THAT DOME IN AIR

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Thoughts on Poetry and the Poets

BY

JOHN VANCE CHENEY

. . With music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome!

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The laud honour and glory of the immortall gods; . . . the memoriall and registry of all great fortunes, the praise of vertue and reproofe of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines, the revealing of sciences naturall and other profitable Arts, the redresse of boistrous and sturdie courages by persuasion, the consolation and repose of temperate myndes, finally the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitorie life. — GEORGE PUTTENHAM.

PREFACE.

THE matter of this volume was prepared in the form of lectures written from time to time for various audiences. Brought together, it naturally proves rather, as Byron styled the "Giaour," a "string of passages" than a connected series of papers. Still, the ever-present conviction that poetry is always poetry, that poetry is of great importance, that there are laws governing poetry, and that these laws can be and should be familiar to the people,—this, perhaps, establishes sufficient continuity to warrant the issue of the collection. Should the inspiring conviction stand out too roughly at times, it will be smoothed down by many another hand, leisured and skilled not to

> "leave it still unsaid in part,
> Or say it in too great excess."

J. V. C.

CHICAGO, *October* 6, 1895.

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I.

THE RELATION OF POETRY TO LIFE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RELIGION.

S the future of poetry, as Matthew Arnold prophesied, "immense"? For the answer to this very important question, we must turn to the past, — to man, his nature and his needs as there recorded. If the past answers that poetry has been of immense influence upon the life of man, we are warranted by the stability of the forces operative about us and within us, in asserting that poetry will continue to be of immense influence; indeed, we cannot, with any show of reason, come to a contrary conclusion.

What is the answer of the past? All that is written rests on oral delivery, — tradition, and the tradition was poetry; that is, the verbal ex-

pression of the fresh, astonished outlook of the child-man, an ardent utterance of matter instinct with imagination, addressed, as poetry is always addressed, to both the mind and the heart, to the intellect and to the emotions. Our history and our literature, sacred and secular, rest on folk-lore, which is always suffused with poetry, luminous with it, and on minstrelsy, which is song itself. War-songs and hymns of praise, lyric voicings of the powers and processes of nature — these lie at the bottom. The matter of our Hesiod and of our Homer belongs not to them, but to the Hesiods and Homers of others, long before them, singing in brightness so far back that it was to the gaze of ancient Greece impenetrable shadow. As has been admirably said of the gleaming sea of fable from which they drew, "[The legends] must be regarded as neither being the inventions nor belonging to the age of the poets themselves, but as sacred relics and light airs breathing out of better times, that were caught from the traditions of more ancient nations, and so received into the flutes and trumpets of the Greeks." This sea of happy imaginings, rich with the rose and gold of the rising sun, stretching betwixt us and the old shores of the unknown, — this sea is poetry; and it was by the sound of its waters, and in the shine of their waking brightness, that

the records of man began. There the first rescuing, preservative utterance was heard, and the far-off music lingers still; yes, and it shall tremble on forever.

As it is with the writings of the Greeks, so it is with the writings of all nations; be the substance sacred or profane, — is it not all sacred? — be the form, now or hereafter, verse or prose, the original was matter of imagination, which always speaks with the accent of song. The heart of the older portion of our Bible, as of all Bibles, is poetry. It is not the priest, not the scribe, that holds us in this new day; it is the prophet, who, massing the idyllic and lyric traditions of a past voiceful with the music of youth, and touching them with the fresh, fusing fire of genius and devotion, sings the might and glory of the God of Righteousness. Farther and farther we may wander away from the old concepts, but the old arc of glory bends overhead, unbroken, and the old music sounds on. Ideas change, but the first heart-gleams flash yet, the burning early words keep the first far-off splendor.

Testimony supporting the immense importance of poetry in the past comes from every age and clime. Merely mentioning the College of Prophets among the people that set the germs of the religion prevailing in this land to-day, let us

turn, for a typical illustration of the great fact around which these observations cluster, to Mr. Edward William Lane in his "Selections from the Kur-án." In 'Okádh, he says, was held yearly a fair, where gathered the merchants and the poets. It was a "literary congress," where rival poets met and contended for the applause of the people. It was there that the language was built and purified. "It was there that the Arab nation once a year inspected itself, so to say, and brought forth and criticised its ideals of the noble and the beautiful in life and in poetry. For it was in poetry that the Arab — and for that matter each man all the world over — expressed his highest thoughts, and it was at 'Okádh that these thoughts were measured by the standard of the Bedawee ideal. The fair not only maintained the highest standard of poetry that the Arabic language has ever reached; it also upheld the noblest idea of life and duty that the Arab nation has yet set forth and obeyed."

The gist of Mr. Lane's report of the Arabs holds true of all civilized antiquity; from time immemorial, poetry has "upheld the noblest idea of life and duty." It has conquered where all other powers have failed, it still conquers where all other powers prove inadequate; and, reasoning from both experience and the nature of man,

its future must be what its past has been, — "immense." Along all lines the original conception has undergone modification; it is still undergoing modification, dictated by new knowledge and new needs; but the essential, basic features remain. Greater modification yet is inevitable; still, modification it will be, not radical change; the old foundation must stand until the mind and heart of man outgrow themselves, become wholly other than they have been and are. Until that time radical change in the place and power of poetry is impossible.

Indisputably language strikes its roots down into the primitive soil of minstrelsy. Now, lest it be thought less evident that the heart of our Bible is of poetic origin, we may pardonably interrogate a Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford. Concerning the passage from the story of Elijah where the ravens bring him food, Canon Cheyne says, —

"Few thinking men will admit that the verse which I have read expresses a fact; but no one formed upon Shakespeare and Milton will deny that it is the highest poetry, full charged, as such poetry always is, with spiritual meaning. Why do we teach our boys and girls Shakespeare and Milton? Is it because they need amusement? No, but because poetry is the symbolic, and if not always the only adequate expression, yet the most universally interesting expression, of the highest and grandest

truth. . . . At each step that we take in the story of Elijah we are enveloped in a golden atmosphere of mingled fact and poetry; this is an elementary lesson of Bible-study. Some Bible-stories are pure facts; others, and those the most delightful, are mingled fact and poetry; this variety to a thoughtful student is a part of the charm of the Biblical literature. . . .

"There was once a great man — his name is precious in the history of England — who wrote a 'Defense of Poetrie.' It is only in the West that such 'Defences' are needed; Poetry, like its sister, Religion, has its native home in the East. I, too, stand here to defend poetry to-day, — the poetry of the greatest of Eastern Books, the Old Testament; and I defend it on many grounds, but especially upon this: that we in England are getting too old in sentiment, and, I think, even in our religious sentiment; and we need to refresh ourselves at the fountains of natural feeling, and above all by entering more deeply into the spirit of those glorious Scriptures which have come down from the time when the world was young."

In the foregoing quotation, the point of the poetic origin of the sacred writings is put none too strongly. Why, indeed, do the Scriptures keep their hold? Why, if not because of the "universally interesting expression of the highest and grandest truth"? The master secret of poetry is its power to seize and keep the attention; the appeal is double, taking at once the

mind and the heart, enchaining the intellect *and* the affections. An old Eastern poet is reported to have said of himself, "Saadi's whole power lies in his sweet words." There is much in the saying; for, though prose may have the substance of poetry, it can never have the music and the splendor of poetry, — the supernal charm, the rapture.

Our Bible rests largely on poetry; and as our religion rests largely on our Bible, our religion rests largely on poetry. Now, if the world has all along had a religion resting largely on poetry, we run little risk in saying that the religion of the future will rest largely on poetry. The indications are, indeed, that the world will rest its religion on poetry more heavily in the future than it has rested it in the past. Never man spoke truer words than old Homer's where he says, "Men cannot go on without the gods." The future of religion is "immense"; from this there is no escape; and poetry is, and must continue to be, the corner-stone of the spiritual building, — which is but another way of saying that the future of poetry is "immense."

As Canon Cheyne phrases it, poetry is the expression of the "highest and grandest truth," not the highest and grandest fact. We are not to cling to the letter, which killeth; we are not to believe, when reading the exalted utterances

of the old Hebrew poets, that we are getting facts. To read them, in this belief, were worse, perhaps, than not to read them at all: "Better be without the Shu-King than to believe every word of it." If we are to come at anything profitable concerning poetry, here is the place to begin. While every method possible to ecclesiastic ingenuity is still employed in defence of the letter, which destroys, it behooves us to observe that the class that has had the nominal control in religious matters, the theologians, has not had, together with the contortions, the divining power. It has not had this power; it has it not now. It is impossible for theology to have this power; for theology is the science of religion, and religion is not a science. Religion is not to be scientifically stated, not to be systematized; it is a personal experience, differing with every human soul in its efforts to live nobly and to commune with the supreme power to which we give the name God. Theology is difficult, religion is simple; theology is rigid, religion is elastic. Theology is a creature of the brain; religion is the native, spontaneous affection of the heart, —

> "All that has been majestical,
> In life or death, since time began,
> Is native in the simple heart of all, —
> The angel heart of man."

Here is the fatal mistake of theology; it says it *knows* concerning things of which we cannot know. This it is that has enveloped belief in the mist that enshrouds it to-day. The doubt characterizing the present time, everywhere manifest from the scholar down to the unlettered laborer, says, "There is no certainty about it; the scientists in matters of religion, after all, do not know." The recent Religious Congresses have done wisely in meeting, not as fellow theologians, but as brother men. Meeting in this capacity, they have taken a step forward. They have discovered that a sincere, well-meaning man, whether he be Jew or Gentile, whether he hail from Boston or from Bombay, is not to be shrunk from; that, whatever his faith be, he may have hope of heaven. It has taken a good many hundreds of years for theology to arrive at this, and it is a matter for general rejoicing that it has got thus far on the road of charity and brotherly love.

The Religious Conferences have added a graceful page to ecclesiastical history; but the sea of "obstinate questionings" sounding, day and night, up and down the shore of thought, the world over, — to that great ocean voice has come no answer. Surely were there an answer to give, it would have been given. Hence it appears only plainer than ever that theology has

done its best to give the world a sufficing, lasting religion; that it has tried, and failed. Why has the religion of theology met this fate? Largely because it has taken the shell for the kernel, the husk for the heart; because it has read the fiction of the Bible for fact, the poetry of the Bible for exact statement and history. Because it has taken glorious outpourings of imagination for positive knowledge, has made the old poets over into historians and scientists. Men of this new day see that scientific, positive religion is a contradiction in terms. They see that the theologians are the last folk in a position to say that they *know* the things whereof they speak; they see that relief must come, if from any source, from those that read the sacred scriptures, not as science and history, but as literature, and put forward that portion of them which, in striving toward truth and peace and joy, soars to the skies of faith, and, returning, says no more than this, —

> "Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not:
> He passeth on also, but I perceive him not."

Yes, science, having come to its strength, has shaken the theologic towers to the ground, and religion returns to go in the eternal doors whence it came out when the world was young, — the doors of poetry. Our Bible, with the other half-dozen Bibles, is literature; and the portion of

this literature, aside from the few moral precepts that underlie all right conduct, that is essential for spiritual nourishment, for encouragement to do faithfully and cheerfully the work of life, is largely poetry.

To accept truth for fact in matters of the highest concern to the human soul, is a serious mistake; it is a fatal mistake. And surely it is none too early to learn that the splendid imaginings of the Bible are not history; that its winged aspiration, its celestial melody, its breathings of lamentation and of joy, free as the wind, are not fixed, rigid statement; that the bulk of that portion of the old Hebrew scriptures found most serviceable for spiritual nourishment and encouragement in carrying on the work of life, is found in one order, for example, with the old Greek scriptures; that both are found in the order of poetry. Not that these two old scriptures are of equal value as a stay of religion; it is affirmed simply that they belong to one and the same class. Take, for illustration, two extracts, — one from the book of Exodus, the other from the Iliad, —

"And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." — *Exod.* xix. 18.

"Kronion spake, and bowed his dark brow, and the ambrosial locks waved from the king's immortal head, and he made great Olympus quake." — *Iliad*, bk. 1.

What can be plainer than that these writings are of one and the same order, both pure poetry? The theologians would have us understand that Javeh actually stood on Sinai, and held converse with Moses; while, as for Kronion's standing on Olympus and talking with Thetis, he never did any such thing. The theologians are not apt to stickle for consistency. If one of these accounts is history, why not the other? We have, at least, consistency on our side when we take the position that these records are simply poetic flights, to give us glimpses of the one high, unknown power behind all life, — the power that the Hebrew poet named Javeh, and the Greek poet named Kronion.

These extracts are rather descriptive than didactic; but the same rule of interpretation applies to the more didactic passages, except, of course, those that lay down moral principles in straight, unmistakable prose.

"But," cries one, "if the Bible as history and science is done for, the whole building is fallen. If the portion of the Bible on which we are to lean heaviest is fiction, 't is but ruins, rubbish; away with it! A lame crutch indeed is dream

and shadow." No, the theology is fallen, but not the poetry, the stay of religion. This sort of dream, this sort of shadow, is, of all supports, most strong and during. We cannot afford to throw it away while there remains a single soul that reaches beyond itself, that strives to solve the mystery in which it lives and moves, that struggles to lift itself to some recognition of the infinite. This dream, this shadow, is the voice of great souls that have striven in the years that are behind us, the highest of all voices for counsel and comfort. It is our own voice, risen to the power for which we have longed; it is our own heart, grown large and valiant, beating on the awful wall scaled only by the strongest, bravest, and best of mortals. Away with the poetry of the Bibles, of our own Bible in particular? Never; therein lies our chief encouragement, our chief exaltation and joy. Yes, therein abides sustenance for the only religion safe against the assault of time, satisfying alike to the head and to the heart; the only religion that will not fade in the growing day of knowledge. But take the Bible as literature, but take the record of glorious imaginings for what they are, the sublimest utterances that the ear of man has heard, and every mind and every heart must find sustenance and solace, find strength and joy. The poet's religion is a solemn joy; nevertheless it is a joy, and the only

joy that has not gone out in the gloom round man's pathway since first he took up the burden of life. There seems to be no way of escape from the conclusion that the chief stay of our strength and joy is now, and must be in the future, the immortal utterance of those whom Plato styles "the children of the gods, the poets and prophets"; the hallowed song of those that gild the few simple rules of right conduct with the light that never was on sea or land, that flash them into the heart; of those that, keeping pace with the increased knowledge of the years, set these rules aflame with contagious emotion, and, mingling with them loftiest intuitions and aspirations, round all into the whole of supernal beauty to which we give the name poetry.

Religion, from the present point of view, is not only beyond the domain of science, it is also beyond the domain of prose. It deals with matters not to be calculated, not to be scientifically stated; matters concerning which the most that can be done is to throw out hints, to give expression to some momentary phase, to voice some instant yearning, to speak for the sudden start of emotion, the rush and lift of feeling, vanishing even while it presses and rises. Prose may give us the religion of figures and formulas, of metaphysics and miracles, the religion of theology; but this, as we have found, is the religion that no longer serves, —

"Ac Theologie has tened me ten score tymes,
The more I muse there-inne the mistier it seemeth."

Very different is the religion that rests on poetry from the religion that rests on theology. To adopt it, we have not to lay aside our reason, have not to subject ourselves to the machinations of perverted ingenuity, to torture our brains with wandering through scholastic structures pillared on the wind; we have simply to be our best selves, with mind and heart open to the high voice that speaks to the reverent listener in all times and in all places. The poet, ministering to our spiritual need, but sings over in our ears the noblest thought that has been sent out into the vast, the purest, loftiest emotion that has quickened human hearts to deeds of charity and love. He does no more than hold before us the grandest experiences of life, opening to us the source of permanent strength and joy; consummating his benefaction with the highest achievement of mortal power, his suggestions, shining as the stars in heaven, of Him that holds all things in the hollow of his hand.

"Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment;
Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:
Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters;
Who maketh the clouds his chariot:
Who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

Such is the God of the old Hebrew poetry, such is the God of poetry to-day.

But while the poetry of our Bible is more important to us in this land than the poetry of all the other Bibles combined, by no means all that may help us to lead right and rounded lives comes from Job, from Isaiah, from the Psalm-writers, and from the Christ. Not a little matter that may help us, is the bequest of ancient nations that had no Bibles proper; not a little such matter is the bequest of pagan antiquity; for much of the teaching of pagan antiquity tends to the exaltation of beauty, the power of which is eternal among men; and no inconsiderable portion of it tends to the perfection of the body, that part of man not to be ignored if he would have his steps happy while he walks the shore of time. Would we lead full and happy lives, we must look down as well as up; the gray old earth is a jealous mother. "Take care lest, while you are watching heaven, you lose the earth." The mass of mankind, whatever course fanatics pursue, never forgets this excellent pagan maxim. The ethics of Christianity, though vastly superior in many respects to the ethics of paganism, is weak on the physical side, on the side of things terrestrial and temporal, especially in the light emphasis put on the needs and privileges of the body; therefore, however the teachings

of religious leaders and the histories of religious sects may read, the fact remains that the masses have continued to live, in certain particulars, in accordance with the teachings of paganism. It could not well be otherwise; for Nature, after all, is the controlling power over her children, and that part of the teaching of paganism of which we speak was taken *verbatim* from the lips of the universal mother. The religion that rests on poetry accepts the teachings of the universal mother. The religion that rests on poetry discredits the Plutarchian account of the death of Pan; and in so doing it makes a strong appeal to man, does much toward winning general acceptation.

Attention has been called to the features of paganism that survive; and it may be properly remarked here, that the features of the Christian religion that actually survive, that really live, and rule the hearts of men, are not those features with which theology has overlaid and darkened the simple, beautiful, universally acceptable teachings of the Master, but the utterances of the Master himself; the simple, manly, wise, and tender, verifiable truths of him that spoke as man never spoke before, and as man has not spoken since. The religion that rests on poetry accepts these utterances, accepts them unreservedly and most warmly; for they lie at the foun-

dation of the noblest conceptions and aspirations of the soul.

But while these utterances are more to us than the best utterances of paganism, the religion that rests on poetry cannot let go all the teachings of paganism; the teachings of Greece in particular, — the Iliad, the immortal dramas, the writings of Plato. Nor can be spared the teachings of the old pagan race that gave us the Æneid and the orations of Cicero. The teaching of Greece and Rome lays stress upon beauty and upon physical perfection, but it does not stop there. "All things are full of Jove": here Virgil voices not only the belief of his own people, but of all civilized antiquity. The theologians will have it that Greece and Rome were so godful as to be godless; the people will not have it so. The religion that rests mainly on the poetry of the ancient Hebrews and on the simple, verifiable teachings of Christ will not have it so; it recognizes the worth of the religion of Greece and Rome. There, too, it sees the reliance on the unknown and almighty power that lies behind all things. "Fight not with the gods," comes the warning voice of Euripides; and Æschylus adds, "Rather have all men hostile than offend the gods." "We have excelled all nations and peoples," says Cicero, "by our wisdom in this, that we have clearly perceived

that all things are governed and directed by the immortal gods." And can we afford to forget those words from Sophocles, —

> "The man whom God unto ill doom doth lead,
> Sees and is blind, deems right the wrongful deed;
> And brief his date is, and his doom assured"?

The religion that rests on poetry adopts the wise saying of Theodore Parker, "Nobody is as great as everybody." It accepts the combined wisdom of the world: the sacred books of the ancient East are its inheritance, and every utterance of the unbroken strain of song and high philosophy from the poets of old down to Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, and Emerson, down to the last of the master voices whose melodies were our delight while yet the singers were alive.

If the present findings accord with the facts, the masses have leaned on poetry as the main support of religion from time immemorial. The reliance has been largely unconscious. This may well be the distinguishing point of difference between the religion of the past and the religion of the future. The religion of the future — if prophecy is pardonable — will *consciously* rest on poetry. The theology will be eliminated, the sects will disappear, and men will meet on the broad ground of poetry, the

only ground on which it is possible to unite all interests, to bring all minds and hearts into lasting accord.

The religion that rests on poetry, it must not be forgotten, rests, of necessity, on music, on sculpture and painting. Every form of high imagination, every kind of noble, lifting expression, must support and swell the riches of the universal religion. All great art is the handmaid of genuine religion.

But our way is not continually on the hills of religion. Beauty, in and for itself, is, perhaps, the next necessity after religion to one that would get the most out of life. We are haunted by the ideal, by the vision of perfection, by the high dream, the lustre of which, glinting down at fortunate moments, irradiates the common way of toil and care. In the region of the beautiful, the perfect, in the realm of ideality lying between man's yearning toward God and his efforts in the performance of the humblest duty, — in this wide region poetry reigns, as it reigns in the realm of religion, supreme. Here, also, it is the ruling power, supplementing faith, patience, and reverence with health-giving, joy-giving beauty, spread lavishly as the sunlight is showered on the mountains and into the valleys. The significant situations and experiences

of every-day life, the pleasing phenomena of nature, are here woven together in imperishable melody, which wells up hourly in the hearts of those familiar with it, dispelling the gloom and softening the harshness that make heavy the lot of him that knows not the "divine delightfulness" of song. The mind, the heart, that is fed on poetry, is conscious of a perpetual influx of strength, buoyancy, and courage. The way, after all, has a thousand flowers to one thorn, has myriad happy airs to one wail of want, of doubt, or despair. Poetry doth "raise and erect the mind." There is something in the very movement of the words, a "happy valiancy," which invigorates and enlivens, makes us strong and joyous, proof against the harassing little hurts, the stings of the gnat-swarm infesting the general air as we journey. Many a wayfarer, in need of a mental or a moral tonic, would rather recall a few lines from Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, or Emerson than the gist of the longest doctrinal sermon; in preference to the battle-cry of an army of schoolmen, would have for martial inspiration one perfect utterance aglow with the gold of the morning of the heart, ringing with the music of eternal youth, the music that only the poet can wake. Recall the farewell scene between crested Hector and Andromache of the fragrant bosom; summon before the mind's eye

Helen nearing the wall, shedding round her unspeakable loveliness as she comes; look on wayworn Ulysses, striving to clasp his shadowy mother in the dim Land of the Dead; stand in the presence of Prospero as, laying aside his magic cloak, he turns to that whitest embodiment of innocence, his daughter, and asks,

> "Canst thou remember
> A time before we came unto this cell?"

behold in Paradise Lost the chariot "instinct with spirit," the wheels set with beryl, aflame with "careering fires," — behold the chariot of the Most High rolling on, bearing him that stepped into it from the "right hand of glory"; — let the mind fix itself for a moment on some one among the thousand thousand splendors of poetry new or old, then name another source from which the whole being can catch the exhilaration that it gives, can take the sudden strength that it imparts. There is little danger of exaggerating the resources of the poets for strength and joy. Those souls of the steadfast-looking habit, those souls that see so deep and wide, and tell what they have seen in heavenly melody, — what hallowing experience escapes them, what vision of healing beauty? To them, the wind harps of the spirit, belongs Thomson's tribute, —

"Ah me! what hand can touch the string so fine,
Who up the lofty diapason roll
Such sweet, such sad, such solemn airs divine,
Then let them down again into the soul!"

The petrifaction of bodies in the grave is rare; but the petrifaction of spirits in life is common. The great preventive against this petrifaction — is it not poetry? To the poets — with the poets are included always the musical composers — we must look first, not only for the highest support and encouragement, but for the gentle ministration that is our consolation and joy through all the vast region stretching between the highland of religion and the valley of toil.

Before passing to a few closing observations on the alleged strife between poetry and science, a word should be said concerning the mechanical theory of the early poetry.

A reason commonly assigned for the use of the poetic form in the oldest writings is, that certain elements of it — alliteration, rhythm, and so on — are a great help to memory. More than this should be said. It should be said that tradition was embodied for preservation in much the same form in which it originated because this was the only form that could contain it. To divorce the original substance from the original form would be to divide soul from body; which

means, not preservation, but destruction. The native voice of youth and imagination is song, and song it must remain if the voice be not lost. Beneath the mnemonic expedient lies one of the profoundest secrets of life; concerning which Aristotle throws out a hint where he asserts the parallel movement between sound vibration and the pulsing of the soul, and Bacon another hint where he says, "And we see that by these insinuations and congruities with man's nature and pleasure, joined also with the agreement and consort it [poetry] hath with music, it hath had access and estimation in rude times and barbarous regions, where other learning stood excluded." The "access" and "estimation" won by poetry in the beginning, are its during inheritance.

The essential features of poetry, and the old need of it, be it said once more, remain; poetry endures, however, and must more and more endure, under new conditions, differentiating it, in particulars, from what it has been. The old tones will sound on, but the strain will be new; the imagination will move in the old strength and splendor, but over unbroken ground, along trackless ways. For this acquisition of territory the advance of knowledge will be responsible; science especially, as the leading force of progress. The old poetry was given to prophecy;

it had to do the work of the powers of exact knowledge. The new poetry, while it will not cease, on occasion, to anticipate the findings of science, will occupy itself mainly, it is safe to say, in warming and coloring, in transfiguring, the findings of science for the sustenance and solace, for the stay and delight, of the world. Questions religious, social, and political are not now what they have been. Poetry recognizes this, and will recognize it more and more; for perception, and pliancy to the demand of the hour, are of the fibre of its might. There should be no fear that science will destroy poetry; poetry, though opposed to science in method, is the faithful ally of science. The thoughts of God are not internecine. The master forces of mind and heart are never at war among themselves; step by step, they push peacefully forward together toward perfection.

Wordsworth foresaw the change that has come, and the greater change in waiting: —

"If the time should ever come when what is now called science becomes familiarized to men, then the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, the mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed. He will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science; he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself."

But, says one, suppose poetry should accommodate itself to the new time, should operate on the basis of new facts, its power may be disproportionate to its power in the past; the "aëration of the understanding," now attributable to poetry, may be attained by means of added facts. We have no reason so to believe. If it is in the co-operation of fact and art that we find the secret of the immortality of the Greeks, we can hardly find that knowledge will reach a point where the art of arts can be dispensed with. The charm of beauty will, of itself, preserve poetry, maintain it in the old position of supremacy.

But it is in much more than the charm of beauty that poetry is supreme: it is in much more than the charm of beauty that we find assurance that, whatever changes come, it will hold the old place and power. Poetry deals with an order of truth in the pursuit of which art has no rival; it and the parent power, music, win access, by methods wholly their own, to high and secret places of being reached by no other ministrant. Besides sharing with science dominion over man's intellect, poetry holds and must ever hold in sole supremacy his heart, his soul. Exact knowledge may not hope to suffice for the support and solace of the emotions, of the affections. Exact knowledge, multiplied a thousand times, may not hope to suffice for the future man; still will weigh the heavy,

> " iron time
> Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears."

As science brings each noble task to a noble end, poetry must take up the work, and carry it on to the perfection that assures the satisfaction of the whole man, — of the brain and the heart. The brain may be the man,

> " And yet when all is thought and said,
> The heart still overrules the head."

They of the Macaulay kind would send us back to barbarism for the great achievements of poetry. Not so; the first of powers in time and in importance, it keeps its early hold. The mind and heart of man begin in poetry, and end in it; so is the circle closed.

A recent writer, busying himself with the relation between science and the æsthetic judgment, says, —

> " The fact is that with the growth of our scientific knowledge the basis of the æsthetic judgment is changing and must change. There is more real beauty in what science has to tell us of the chemistry of a distant star, or in the life-history of a protozoön, than in any cosmogony produced by the creative imagination of a pre-scientific age. By 'more real beauty' we are to understand that the æsthetic judgment will find more satisfaction in the former than in the latter. It is this continual gratification of the æsthetic judgment that is one of the chief delights of the pursuit of pure science."

The assertion that there will be a shifting of the æsthetic judgment has been anticipated; but the quotation makes it necessary to observe that "cosmogony" is not a province of the poet. That the old poet, passing his native bounds, occupied a field that there was no one else to take at the time, is no reason for judging him by his work there, no excuse for instituting a comparison between it and the work of science in this new day. The old Hebrew poet — he may stand for the old poets — occupying the empty field of the scientist, did not take possession after the manner of the scientist. He entered in search, not of facts, but of truth. Says Canon Cheyne, —

"The so-called cosmogony was not meant to be taken as an account of what we call 'facts'; it is not a specimen of rudimentary science or pseudo-science. How far the idea of natural science had dawned upon the Babylonians may be left an open question; there is no evidence that it had dawned upon the Israelites in Old Testament times. A pious Hebrew writer takes a semi-mythical narrative current either in his own or in some neighboring nation, and moulds it into a vehicle of spiritual truth. . . . It is useless then for the experts in other subjects to depreciate this document on scientific grounds; it is the underlying spiritual truths against which alone, with due seriousness, it is admissible to argue."

For the "real beauty," and for the real might as well, of the old poet singing before science was, we must take him in his own field, a field that yields a small harvest to toilers in cosmogony, —

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

After the astronomer has spoken, there is a word left to say, — a word in no wise conflicting, but additional and important. After science has spoken its word of analysis and explanation of the phenomena of nature, there is need of a word further, — the transfiguring word of the poet concerning the Power behind the phenomena, the Power

"Which shaketh the world out of her place,
And the pillars thereof tremble.

"Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not;
And sealeth up the stars.

"Which alone stretcheth out the heavens,
And treadeth upon the waves of the sea.

"Which maketh the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south.

"Which doeth great things past finding out;
Yea, marvellous things without number.

"Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not:
He passeth on also, but I perceive him not."

To inquire profitably into the beauty and might that the poet rears on a foundation of science, we must come this side of Dante — Dante, who mastered and bent to his use the knowledge of his time — down to our own day, to Tennyson. Throughout Tennyson's music are plainly to be heard the undertones of science; the great facts recently unearthed, the mould of ages clinging to them, are launched, and borne along the golden current side by side with the lightest fancies. The laureate had the advantage of his predecessors, living, as he did, at a time when science could become a basis for the superstructure of imagination. We turn to him first, among his contemporaries, because he it was, in particular, that nature and training enabled to seize this momentous advantage and act upon it. The use he made of the new stock of knowledge bears out the belief that the poetry of the future will give no inconsiderable proportion of its force to the quickening, the warming, of fact, to the kindling of it into the mystic ignition the flame of which the soul loves, and moves in as in its own native element. Tennyson strengthens us in the conviction that

> "When Science reaches forth her arms
> To feel from world to world, and charms
> Her secret from the latest moon,"

the poet will give liberally of his strength toward the completion of the victory by setting the

secret in transfiguring words. This will be done. It must be done before the importance and meaning of the secret can burn into the mind and heart of the world, and so set aglow the general life. Hope and love, with the voice of music, must rehabilitate, yes, reshape and vitalize, ignite, the fact if we are not to stop with mere intellectual apprehension, if we are to pass on to assimilation, to perfect appropriation and practice.

Says Professor Shaler in his thoughtful little volume, "The Interpretation of Nature," —

"So long as learning remains in the shape in which the investigator leaves it, it is generally useless to the uninitiated in the science. It is only when the poet does his work, when he phrases the truth in a form to appeal to the imagination . . . that the public has a profit from the inquiry."

> "Wait, and Love himself will bring
> The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
> Of wisdom. Wait; my faith is large in Time,
> And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

Science does not speak with this accent, nor does it add this final, consummating word.

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,"

sings the same poet, with the great facts of science in mind, then adds yet again the consummating word; so do we move on to

"The closing cycle rich in good."

Firm is the faith in growing knowledge; but the end must be "rich in good." When growing knowledge leads to another goal than this, then shall it be thrust aside, —

> "Not only cunning casts in clay:
> Let Science prove we are, and then
> What matters Science unto men?"

The immortality of life and love, the end "rich in good," — these science itself will not be permitted to violate. At these its authority stops; at these the poet makes a beginning, puts on his prophet's robe, and presses hopefully forward.

Such, roughly speaking, is the attitude of poetry toward science; but while bearing it in mind, we are not to forget that the poet has, beyond the power of summarizing and revoicing the knowledge uncovered by others, that surpassing gift, his own peculiar might in original investigation, —

> "The poet in his vigil hears
> Time flowing through the night, —
> A mighty stream, absorbing tears,
> And bearing down delight:
> There, resting on his bank of thought,
> He listens, till his soul
> The voices of the waves has caught,
> The meaning of their roll."

II.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

THE poet Gray complained that he was neither a cat to see in the dark, nor an eagle to face the sun; not a whisper of this do we get from Emerson. Cat and eagle are mere moles to him who says, "I am a transparent eyeball." Emerson, of all our poets, sees; be it noontide or twilight, the glance is straight and piercing. Not only does he see through the light, but he absorbs it, "illuminating the untried and unknown." Emerson's mastery over light distinguishes him from his compeers, and, coupled with his ability "to put his private fact into literature," gives him the electric, seminal strength which comes first in a computation of his power. Sight, imagination, and inspiration standing foremost among his gifts, Emerson was a seer, a reporter, a mighty applier of ideas to life. His aim was truth, his mission to tell us "how to live well"; he was to the last the lover

of youth and beauty, he was a receiver of the distilled wisdom of the ages, he was virile and benign; in short, he could make a brave showing of the gifts characterizing the great poets of old. A "redeemer of the human mind," sitting there in quiet Concord so many years, he was in reality as much abroad as at home; host of the great souls of all time, his hand was on the pulse of his own time, to the needs of which it was his chief aim to minister.

Emerson sought to fortify his fellows, to sow in them the seed of growth, to render them stanch, self-sufficient, and happy. He strove for this, and the striving was not in vain. "O my brother, God exists"; "Think thy thought"; "Hug your fact"; "Let us advance and advance on chaos and the dark," — the utterances came with an accent so new that life quickened at the sound, the soul took on strength, character rebuilt itself, and hope, honor, and courage were once more supreme. Christian and Pantheist, Stoic and Epicurean, Epictetus, Saadi, and plain Yankee commingled and etherized, Emerson once more set up the ideal, and Faith had again a glowing mark whereon to fix her eyes. The very air grew generative round him, and from him spread far and wide strength and beauty of living.

These spread round him, and they have not

ceased to spread. The strength and beauty of living nurtured by "transcendentalism" did not perish, as some would have it, with Emerson and his immediate disciples. Science has been busy, pushing its positivism, but it has not crowded out the instinct for the higher life. Science has not made away with this instinct, upon which Emerson set so much and which he so strengthened, nor has science sought to make away with it. Such is the fact, though we be as long learning it as we are that seekers for the truth, however opposed their methods, are always friendly; though we be as long learning it as we are in learning that the essence of poetry is its practicality.

Much has been said by way of comparison between Emerson and Carlyle. It is not necessary to continue this; but one point, at least, should be kept in mind: the ideality of Emerson gave him an all-important possession, — "immortal hilarity, the rose of joy." The abstract perfection ever before his eyes, he could be happy; whereas Carlyle, who looked to see it embodied, was doomed to vexation and sorrow.

Plato and Franklin in equal parts, poet and man of affairs, Emerson is our one great teacher. Revise your facts, he says, keep pace with experience; formulate anew, and, with the watchwords honesty, trust, modesty, valor, press on.

While the gist of the message is not new, the temperament and the presentation are so rare as to establish signal originality. These are of the kind that "make the talent trusted"; they betoken the oracle, the divinity.

Emerson was elevation — and consequently serenity — incarnate. Strange elevation of spirit seems to be characteristic of the family. Dr. Holmes, speaking of Charles Chauncy Emerson, the youngest brother, says, "He was for me the very ideal of an embodied celestial intelligence." Carlyle, recalling Emerson's stay with him, describes him as an "angel visitant." The word "angelic," seldom required in a description of mortals, is one of the common words in all the talk about Emerson. The "angelic" impression was largely due to a gift of temperament, manifest in the seer's manner, in the light of his eye, and in the tones of his voice. He did not have to hitch his own wagon to a star; nature had done the hitching, he had but to get in and ride. This means decided individualism; and singularly individual Emerson remained to the last, though wont to move in the very centre of the wisdom of the world. "Angelic" individualism, flowing from his pen, as from his person, gave everywhere the touch of the extraordinary. Individual, extraordinary, Emerson is, even in his borrowing. Come the matter whence it may,

the presentation is such as to "charm down resistance."

On the point of presentation, let us take first Emerson's own notion of the poet, and see how his work squares by it. "The poet," he says, is one "who sees and handles that which others dream of," who has the "largest power to receive and to impart." "The value of genius to us is the veracity of its report. Talent may frolic and juggle; genius realizes and adds." Emerson's might is our "largest power"; of it can we affirm with most confidence, it "realizes and adds." Again he says: "This insight, which expresses itself by what is called imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others."

It would be a long look for a better definition of imagination. No man can so write of poetry without having the secret of it. With Emerson, the poet is still the "winged man," "inhabiting the all-piercing, all-feeding, and ocular air of heaven." Elsewhere he adds, "Over everything stands its dæmon, or soul; and as the form of the thing is reflected by the eye, so the soul of the thing is reflected by a melody."

"Melody" — here we come to the points of

form and music. Beyond dispute, Emerson sees and tells; but has the voice the perfect accent? Characteristics that militate against style, whether in prose or in poetry, must be at once admitted. The thoughts are apt to stand isolated, or in jagged lines; nor is the effort of the reader reduced to the minimum. The ideas do not run together into the perfect and graceful whole, into the delightful symmetry, that stamps a work of art; the procession is halting and disorderly. The receiver is everywhere evident, but not the maker. Moreover, Emerson is guilty of truisms and paradoxes; he is impatient of discussion, of analysis; he does not care to face his opponent, he is not willing to face his differing self, as he appeared yesterday, or as he may appear to-morrow; he trusts to the moment, seeing and saying as the instant reveals and prompts. The utterance abounds in "knots and stonds"; mystic riddles are stuck in many a chance corner. Briefly, indifference to all but truth, wilfulness unpardonable in one of less gentle spirit, is sometimes rather the staple than the exception.

For these reasons, among others, Arnold could not find Emerson a "legitimate poet"; could not find him either a great poet or a great man of letters. There is no gainsaying the fact that Emerson exhibits grave faults, chief among them being coherence of expression so slight as to

deserve a no more substantial term than atmospheric. True it is that the thoughts dart out, one after another, complete in themselves, held together by invisible links of the spirit only. The essays, as is well known, were prepared for the platform, — the place where Emerson was, perhaps, most at home. The method is that of the talker; and despite the after-pains to make the discourses essays, discourses, platform-talks, they still remain. And as with the prose, so with the poetry the lyceum method continues in control.

Emerson exhibits grave faults as a literary artist; but art is not the sum of human achievement. Compared with the rare gifts of Emerson, art, all but the very greatest, is common and cheap. Arnold recognizes this fact, and finds Emerson of "superior importance," for the hour at any rate, to a "great poet," to a "great writer," to a "great philosophy-maker." They must be very rare and costly qualities that make the possessor even the peer of a great poet; and in such a case we are not surprised to find that the fortunate one is important, is great, not by reason of qualifications differing from those of the great poet, but by reason of certain of the very same qualities that go to the making of a great poet. So it is with Emerson; he is the peer of the great poets for the reason that, while

he has not all the qualifications of the great poet, he has many of them; and is in these so rich as to compensate for the loss in the qualifications weak or wanting. Sight, imagination, inspiration, skill in single words and phrases, — these are present in such strength as to hide the deficient continuity and musical sustentation. The fusing power is comparatively weak; but impressiveness, wondrous impressiveness, is possible by means of single words that fairly burst with meaning, by reason of phrases that spread vistas rarely opened by the most daring dreamers, the master spirits of the world. Such is the lift of spirit that the heaviest fact takes wing, and we find ourselves following it, snatched up from the clod and the rock to float in the ether. The pith, the quintessence, of high truth is served at a mid-air feast, in the dominion of the enchanter. The powers of condensation — another word for expansion — and suggestion, are tried to their utmost, fastening things impalpable, most evanescent. It is a new world, and we are new beings, strangers to our former selves. Strong in heart and hope, quick in spirit, we are suddenly wise and satisfied, safe against fate itself.

Surely, if the matter that can effect this is neither great prose nor great poetry, it is magic stuff of some sort. All our generative intellects together have not had the quickening might of

this man, who is neither a great prose writer, a great poet, nor a great philosophy-maker. Ah, but the dæmon! with the dæmon is the victory. In the journey along the way of the cloud, on beyond, where the mist can never come, what homely, every-day work is wrought, — work close and substantial as any possible to the ground! Master of the practical is this serene leader on the upper ways. "To him," says Lowell, "more than to all other causes together, did the young martyrs of our Civil War owe the sustaining strength of thoughtful heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives." Greater victory than this was never won by a great poet; and the testimony touches but one class of the many stirred to the depths of being, roused, strengthened, set on to new endeavor, by the gentle seer with the dæmon at his side.

Though Emerson's place is with Socrates and Epictetus, with the immortal talkers, still, sharing, as he does, with the great poets many essentials of their greatness, he must be numbered among them also. The poet is behind every sentence, whether of prose or of verse; and it is the poet, as before shown, of the rarest kind, — he with the dæmon. No great poet has ever leaned harder upon the invisible powers that are the stay of the soul, and none has ever been in closer communion with them. Indeed, here is to be

discovered a cause for the weakness on the side of art. It is too high reporting to catch more than a word at a time. It is not a gaze, but a series of glances. Such is the brightness of the light that the eyes are closed at the end of each sentence, which is in itself a complete vision. Consequently we have essay within essay, poem within poem, these linked only by the mystic continuity necessitated by the one high source.

"Eloquent in trope and utterance when his vaulting intelligence frees itself for the instant," says Bronson, "yet see his loaded eye, his volleyed period; jets of wit, sallies of sense, breaks, inconsequences, all betraying the pent personality from which his rare accomplishments have not yet liberated his gifts, nor given him unreservedly to the Muse and mankind." Though we all recognize the fidelity of this description, the picture is not complete. In the verses, "rammed with life," there is, besides power, both music and beauty; there is, besides, that for which art is, after all, the only name. There is, for the soul, wholeness of impression and beauty. To the nature of beauty Emerson's own words are the fittest testimony: —

"The best of beauty is a finer charm than skill in surfaces, in outlines, or rules of art can ever teach, namely, a radiation from the work of art, of human

character, — a wonderful expression through stone, or canvas, or musical sound, of the deepest and simplest attributes of our nature."

About the lovely radiation of character there is no question, and this must not be left out of the count. All the detractions admitted, the fact remains that, beyond the great man, the great teacher, Emerson is a poet. The "dearest and gravest ministrations to the imagination and the soul" are to be heard from him; and of such are pre-eminently the utterances of the poet. His attitude toward truth, toward youth and beauty, is the poet's attitude. No other man among us reveals Emerson's sympathy with youth. As an abstraction it is ever in his thought, and to the last his favorite hearers were the young. "Flowers so strictly belong to youth that we adult men soon come to feel that their beautiful generations concern not us. . . . The flowers jilt us, and we are old bachelors with our ridiculous tenderness." Close is the sympathy with youth, equally close the sympathy with beauty. "This indescribable beauty," he says of Nature; "beauty breaks in everywhere"; and he makes a like report of the spiritual world.

The reporter of truth, youth, and beauty must perforce be a lover of Nature, and Emerson is indeed an affectionate son of the Good Mother. "He who knows the most, he who knows what

sweets and virtues are in the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments, is the rich and royal man." If any one has known how to come at these enchantments, it is the author of "Woodnotes," "Monadnoc," and "May-Day." Such is his love that we find in it another cause for the indifference to art: as truth is more than art, so Nature is more, and must be first obeyed. "Nature never rhymes her children," and he will not rhyme his own well. But Emerson is no slave even to nature; he will not "camp out and eat roots," he will not be a woodchuck, — an experiment to which Thoreau was sorely tempted. Here, as everywhere, he is sane and wise. If "the perception of the inexhaustibleness of nature is an immortal youth," if he finds so much in the ground, he nevertheless holds it lightly, in view of the immense promise it gives of possessions beyond.

Though in Emerson's case we do not look first for the artist, it is going too far to find him as much a poet in his prose as in his verse.

"Now we learn what patient periods must round themselves before the rock is formed, then before the rock is broken, and the first lichen race has disintegrated the thinnest external plate into soil, and opened the door for the remote Flora, Fauna, Ceres, and Pomona, to come in.

How far off yet is the trilobite! how far the quadruped! how inconceivably remote is man! All duly arrive, and then race after race of men. It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul."

"I wrote the past in characters
Of rock and fire the scroll,
The building in the coral sea,
The planting of the coal.

"And thefts from satellites and rings
And broken stars I drew,
And out of spent and aged things
I formed the world anew;

. . . . .

"Time and Thought were my surveyors,
They laid their courses well;
They boiled the sea, and baked the layers
Of granite, marl, and shell.

"But he, the man-child glorious, —
Where tarries he the while?
The rainbow shines his harbinger,
The sunset gleams his smile.

"My boreal lights leap upward,
Forthright my planets roll,
And still the man-child is not born,
The summit of the whole."

Here, obviously enough, are two distinct styles; and if one is in doubt as to whether Emerson was a true poet, if not a great poet, the doubt

will vanish on reading the remaining stanzas of this same Nature song.

Emerson is withal a lyrist; thinking often in rhythm, he sometimes thinks in airiest melody. As about the man, so about the poems, there is something celestial; notwithstanding the blemishes, it is a seraph's manuscript. The faults are those of the habitat. Arnold's phrase, "a strain, new, moving, and unforgetable," does not tell the whole story. At least one third of the volume of verse published in 1846, is choice poetry, original, imaginative, struck out at the bidding of the dæmon. Our principal literary organ at the time testified to the appearance of a genius by characterizing the work as "fantastic nonsense," "silly pedantry," and by calling into question the author's sanity. So it has always been, and so, probably, it will always be. "The Sphinx," which was a stumbling-block in 1847, is a stumbling-block still; but one stanza of it, if no more, betokens the seer and the sayer, the reporter of life born, not made: —

> "Up rose the merry Sphinx,
> And crouched no more in stone;
> She melted into purple cloud,
> She silvered in the moon;
> She spired into a yellow flame;
> She flowered in blossoms red;
> She flowed into a foaming wave;
> She stood Monadnoc's head."

For imagination, and movement that follows the life, this stanza is a standing model.

Among the poets of late years, Wordsworth only has matched the exceptional excellences of the next two poems, "Each and All," and "The Problem."

> "I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
> Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
> I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
> He sings the song, but it pleases not now,
> For I did not bring home the river and sky;—
> He sang to my ear,—they sang to my eye."

"Good-Bye," "Woodnotes," "The Rhodora," "The Humble-Bee," "The Snow-Storm,"—these poems lack neither fusion nor continuity, and they have the test accent. For ease and melody—weak points with Emerson—how many singers have surpassed such lines as these?—

> "Hot midsummer's petted crone,
> Sweet to me thy drowsy tone
> Tells of countless sunny hours,
> Long days, and solid banks of flowers;
> Of gulfs of sweetness without bound
> In Indian wildernesses found;
> Of Syrian peace, immortal leisure,
> Firmest cheer, and bird-like pleasure."

The longer poem, "Woodnotes," is of less even excellence; but seldom, indeed, have we received so exhilarating an invitation as that summed in the line,—

> "Put off thy years, wash in the breeze."

The day it was conceived,

> "'T was one of the charmed days
> When the genius of God doth flow."

Strewn with those happy "finds,"

> "As if a sunbeam showed the place,"

it is not only

> "Painted with shadows green and proud
> Of the tree and of the cloud,"

but it is odorous and melodious with breath

> "Breathed from the everlasting throat."

"Monadnoc," if not so thoroughly suffused with beauty, bespeaks the sinew of him whose food has been the

> "Best of Pan's immortal meat."

Freedom and strength swing their way through it at a pace few can follow; the air is tonic at every step. More than one has asked at the end, has he not come, — the bard and sage waited for,

> "Who, in large thoughts, like fair pearl-seed,
> Shall string Monadnoc like a bead"?

"Hermione," perhaps the loveliest of Emerson's poems, filled with double subtilty as from the

spirits of Wordsworth and Coleridge, this spiced throughout with the new quantity, Yankee enchantment, opens with the only lines that recall the magic of the Abyssinian maid with her dulcimer; and to the end there is little falling off. It is enough to say of any poet that his music, at his best, is sweet when sounded against the melody of Coleridge. This is true of the opening and of other lines of "Hermione," and it is true of the closing stanzas of "The House,"—

> "She lays her beams in music,
> In music every one,
> To the cadence of the whirling world
> Which dances round the sun;
>
> "That so they shall not be displaced
> By lapses or by wars,
> But, for the love of happy souls,
> Outlive the newest stars."

"Musketaquid" is a happy bit of blank-verse autobiography. And so we might go on, page to page, in company with the true poet. If "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit" is always present, the poet is often beside him. Only the poet can

> "The bird-language rightly spell,
> And that which roses say so well;"

and only the poet can sound the depths of spirit struck down to in the crowning song of lamentation. Emerson's high place may be among the immortal talkers; but let it not be forgotten how much he did to

"Bring the flown Muses back to men."

III.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

I.

THE ESSAYS.

HAD Lowell written only the essays on Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, and Dryden, he would have proved himself the most brilliant and intuitive of our critics. As one closes the sixth volume of the essays in the final ten-volume edition of his works, one blinks as if at a pile of opals. We chance first upon the author at sea: —

"But what say you to a twelve days' calm such as we dozed through in mid-Atlantic and in mid-August? I know nothing so tedious at once and exasperating as that regular slap of the wilted sails when the ship rises and falls with the slow breathing of the sleeping sea, one greasy, brassy swell following another, slow, smooth, immitigable as the series of Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets. Even at his best, Neptune, in a *tête-à-tête*, has a way of re-

peating himself, an obtuseness to the *ne quid nimis*, that is stupefying. It reminds me of organ-music and my good friend Sebastian Bach. A fugue or two will do very well; but a concert made up of nothing else is altogether too epic for me. There is nothing so desperately monotonous as the sea, and I no longer wonder at the cruelty of pirates. Fancy an existence in which the coming up of a clumsy finback whale, who says *Pooh!* to you solemnly as you lean over the taffrail, is an event as exciting as an election on shore! The dampness seems to strike into the wits as into the lucifer-matches, so that one may scratch a thought half a dozen times and get nothing at last but a faint sputter, the forlorn hope of fire, which only goes far enough to leave a sense of suffocation behind it. Even smoking becomes an employment instead of a solace."

Here are genuine opals; and the wondrous, if somewhat "unlucky," stones are poured into our lap by the basketful. Whether in the jottings of a journey or in the steady effort of criticism, it is always the gleam, the flash, peculiar to this radiant man of letters, ever the brightness and the surprise. Take up any volume, and we are off for a holiday with a bonfire in the evening. And an all-night bonfire it will be, where learning, now of the ploughman, now of the scholar, and observation wide and keen, furnish the fuel, while wit and satire vie with the purest Yankee

humor as to which shall make the bravest spurt in the general conflagration. There is no moment too sober for a stealthy glint: —

"He [Wordsworth] went quietly over to Germany to write more Lyrical Ballads, and to begin a poem on the growth of his own mind, at a time when there were only two men in the world (himself and Coleridge) who were aware that he had one in any wise differing from those, mechanically uniform, which are stuck drearily, side by side, in the great pin-paper of society."

In the author's own words, "everything grows fresh under his hand"; staleness is impossible. But fond as he is of fine phrases, Lowell is no "mere lackey" to them; as ready as Montaigne, he is also as wise. The first seven pages in his essay on Carlyle evidence the breadth of mind, the knowledge, the insight, that go to the equipment of an all-round man of letters; and ere-long he strikes to the heart of his subject in a single sentence, —

"With a conceptive imagination vigorous beyond any in his generation, with a mastery of language equalled only by the greatest poets, he wants altogether the plastic imagination, the shaping faculty, which would have made him a poet in the highest sense. He is a preacher and a prophet, — anything you will, — but an artist he is not, and never can be."

The shaping-power of imagination is again touched on where he speaks of Lamb in the essay, "Shakespeare Once More," —

"Himself a fragmentary writer, he had more sympathy with imagination where it gathers into the intense focus of passionate phrase than with that higher form of it, where it is the faculty that shapes, gives unity of design and balanced gravitation of parts. And yet it is only this higher form of it which can unimpeachably assure to any work the dignity and permanence of a classic; for it results in that exquisite something called Style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere pervasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness. On a lower plane we may detect it in the structure of a sentence, in the limpid expression that implies sincerity of thought; but it is only where it combines and organizes, where it eludes observation in particulars to give the rarer delight of perfection as a whole, that it belongs to art."

And who has spoken better on the point of imitation of the Greeks? —

"Do we show our appreciation of the Greeks most wisely in attempting the mechanical reproduction of their forms, or by endeavoring to comprehend the thoughtful spirit of full-grown manhood in which they wrought, to kindle ourselves by the emulation of it, and to bring it to bear with all its plastic force

upon our wholly new conditions of life and thought? It seems to me that the question is answered by the fact, patent in the history of all the fine arts, that every attempt at reproducing a bygone excellence by external imitation of it, or even by applying the rules which analytic criticism has formulated from the study of it, has resulted in producing the artificial, and not the artistic. That most subtile of all essences in physical organization, which eludes chemist, anatomist, microscopist, the life, is in æsthetics not less shy of the critic, and will not come forth in obedience to his most learned spells, for the very good reason that it cannot, because in all works of art it is the joint product of the artist and of the time."

There is no question as to the genuineness of such criticism; and the six volumes are freighted with it, agleam, moreover, with the coruscation of wit and humor, of imagination and fancy. Only with this equipment plainly before us can we understand how it was that, besides being a wit, a satirist, a moralist, a critic, the same man could be poet not only, but statesman and diplomatist. As it is, we are ready to believe that he could run every octave possible to the gamut of cleverness; the very thing, indeed, that he did.

"He [Milton] seems always to start full-sail; the wind and tide always serve; there is never any fluttering of the canvas. In this he offers a striking contrast with Wordsworth, who has to go through

with a great deal of *yo-heave-ohing* before he gets under way.

. . . . . .

"Since Dante, no one had stood on these visiting terms with heaven."

When we think of Lowell, this is the sort of expression first in mind, for it is of the marrow of the man; it is the second thought that passes on to the strength of certain of the essays as a whole, such essays as those on Dante, Chaucer, and Spenser in the realm of letters, and on Democracy in the remote realm of politics.

Appreciating the masterly quality of the essays, the brilliance and the strength; admitting Lowell to be the only man of his time that could write them, granting him the many gifts that have brought him homage from the literary class, — why has not his influence for culture spread wider and deeper? Two things seem clear, — one, that his influence for culture is greatly disproportionate to his gifts; another, that what is new in his criticism lies mainly in the manner of presentation. It is well worth while to try to ascertain why the manner of presentation has not, in the present instance, drawn all men. It can be accounted for somewhat, perhaps, by the thought that, well stored as Lowell was, he erred in trusting rather to his own resources than to the font of the ages. Quick, sure as the intuition may

be, it is hardly safe to pit it against the cumulative wealth of time. The old self-method can hardly hold its own, in any hands, against the modern method of the many, the method of science. If Lowell's powers were more dazzling than those of Arnold, they cannot have been so well guided; for the two sowed the same field, and it is Arnold's seed that is now growing. Perhaps Lowell was handicapped by the munificence of his equipment, by a superabundance of scintillating matter, the very burning of which darkened the theme. Perhaps this glowing mind, so bright in itself, was beguiled, at times, into lack of reverence for the milder but more enduring light of certain of his fellow-workers, and even for the steadfast beams of the high star of art. Wit and humor are reactionary; oddly enough, tempting the possessor to take some things too seriously, and, not last among them, himself. Certain it is that, squared by his own rules, Lowell was defective, as an artist, both in his prose and in his poetry. Brought to the standard he supported, he hardly illustrated the primal power of construction, and he was not impeccable in minor points of technics. In fact, despite his persistent humor, he could, on occasion, violate the laws of taste. While humor keeps a wholesome watch on taste, it is capable of assaulting its own ward. It performs that

unnatural office, for instance, where princely Goethe is put in the rôle of a milkmaid, pail in hand, carefully working Herr Böttiger into a corner. Indiscriminate humor is belittling; and no combination of Celtic speed and zest, of Yankee shrewdness and snap, and full and ready scholarship can atone for the tendency to lower high persons and things to the level of the ignoble. This is flatly opposed to the endeavor of the poet, and of the true critic, who studies the poet in order to make the best of him for the bettering of the world. One hesitates to say that the question, "What will nourish us in growth toward perfection?" was the mainspring of Lowell's critical work. It was the mainspring of Arnold's critical work; and this, together with his remembrance of Bacon's warning, to seek rather what should be thought than what can be said, is sufficient largely to account for the richer harvest garnered by the Englishman. Arnold, as fond of a fine phrase as Lowell and as capable of turning it, tries the propriety of its use by a Wordsworthian seriousness; Lowell is wont not to stop for this. Here is one difference between these two writers, and it is a wide and pregnant disparity. Because of this disparity, perhaps, more than for another reason, Arnold's dozen pages on Milton outweigh Lowell's five dozen. When Lowell is finally

through with his inimitable bantering of Professor Masson, he says true and noble things; but he stops with a portrayal of his hero, satisfied, without a word of solemn rejoicing because of our inheritance from him, the inheritance that nourishes in growth toward perfection. We miss the rich conclusion of De Quincey: "Milton is not an author among authors, or a poet among poets, but a power among powers." Lowell leaves before us the noblest of portraits, —

"But it is idle to talk of the loneliness of one the habitual companions of whose mind were the Past and Future. I always seem to see him leaning in his blindness, a hand on the shoulder of each, sure that the one will guard the song which the other had inspired."

This could not be bettered so far as concerns Milton, but to be sure of getting the thing that concerns *us*, we turn to Arnold, —

"All the Anglo-Saxon contagion, all the flood of Anglo-Saxon commonness, beats vainly against the great style, but cannot shake it, and has to accept its triumph. But it triumphs in Milton, in one of our own race, tongue, faith, and morals. Milton has made the great style no longer an exotic here; he has made it an inmate amongst us, a leaven, and a power. Nevertheless he, and his hearers on both sides of the Atlantic, are English, and will remain English, —

'Sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt.'

The English race overspreads the world, and at the same time the ideal of an excellence the most high and the most rare abides a possession with it forever."

As we lay aside these ten volumes, the indisputable evidence of mental endowment in certain respects the most encouraging developed among us, our pride is tempered by unwelcome reflections. Lowell, despite the rare mental endowment, despite the support of health, wealth, and a long lease of years, was not always abreast with the best thought or with the best methods of his time. Such was the case so far as concerns his criticism of poetry. He had a loose hold on the essential truth that the "office of poetry in the modern world is still its ancient office of deliverance"; he did not offer the sacrifice Sainte-Beuve was glad to offer on the altar of song; he did not cultivate the patience, the sobriety of Arnold. It is needless to say that neither of these critics yields to him in the stress put upon the artistic element; they pressed as far as he up the path of art, but refused to rest content there. Yes, ours is a tempered pride; for, compared with the work of the few with whom the author's high gifts place him, we can hardly claim for much of the matter of the essays on the poets and the men of letters more than unique and, at times, amazing entertainment for the literary class.

In this unwelcome reflection is to be heard a voice of warning which should not pass unheeded. Criticism, like poetry, is a hard thing, demanding beyond the most brilliant gifts the "dedicated spirit." "Temper destroys it, a crotchet destroys it, even erudition may destroy it. To press to the sense of the thing itself with which one is dealing, not to go off on some collateral issue about the thing, is the hardest matter in the world."

Poetry herself adds the final word, —

> "When your eyes have done their part,
> Thought must length it in the hart."

II.

THE POEMS.

Now, as we turn to the first of the four volumes of verse, let us adopt the simple plan of noting down the impressions got from gleaning through it at a sitting. The first lines to attract special attention are to be found on the thirteenth page, the first stanza of "With a Pressed Flower,"—

> "This little blossom from afar
> Hath come from other lands to thine;
> For, once, its white and drooping star
> Could see its shadow in the Rhine."

Though this poem of six stanzas is well wrought throughout, the first stanza is, perhaps, the choicest.

The next halting-place is at the lines, "To Perdita, Singing," on page 23, —

> "Thy voice is like a fountain,
> Leaping up in clear moonshine;
> Silver, silver, ever mounting,
> Ever sinking,
> Without thinking,
> To that brimful heart of thine.
> Every sad and happy feeling,
> Thou hast had in bygone years,
> Through thy lips comes stealing, stealing,
> Clear and low;
> All thy smiles and all thy tears
> In thy voice awaken,
> And sweetness, wove of joy and woe,
> From their teaching it hath taken;
> Feeling and music move together,
> Like a swan and shadow ever
> Floating on a sky-blue river
> In a day of cloudless weather."

To one that remembers his Wordsworth, the picture of the swan is not happy, but the inspiration of this piece, too, holds to the end.

On page 32 comes the "Ode" beginning with the familiar line, —

> "In the old days of awe and keen-eyed wonder."

There is a reason for our remembering this line; it is the best line of six pages of blank verse,

evenly respectable, and ending with a well-worn simile, —

> "As when a sudden burst of rattling thunder
> Shatters the blueness of a sky serene."

The first promise of a poet appears, perhaps, on page 46, in "The Rose." Besides being of interest, this piece has poetic atmosphere, an important element not before noticeable. As for the twenty-seven sonnets soon following, suffice it to say that the high-water mark is reached in the one addressed to Wendell Phillips. "A Legend of Brittany" is a smooth-running story, so carefully told as to make it pleasant reading throughout. Among many pretty lines are two not easily forgotten, —

> "As if a lark should suddenly drop dead
> While the blue air yet trembled with its song."

"Prometheus" is hardly beyond the reach of a cultured young man of poetic tendencies.

When we come to "An Incident in a Railroad Car," toward the close are three stanzas, simple, wise, and sweet, that might have dropped from the pen of the Scottish ploughboy, —

> "It may be glorious to write
> Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
> High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
> Once in a century; —

> " But better far it is to speak
> One simple word, which now and then
> Shall waken their free nature in the weak
> And friendless sons of men;
>
> " To write some earnest verse or line,
> Which, seeking not the praise of art,
> Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
> In the untutored heart."

The next and last stanza, the tag of the teacher, shows the prevailing influence of the time, and is, like all its kindred in Longfellow and the rest, a blemish.

In " Rhœcus " passages of classic beauty streak the sea of modern instruction with the pure poetic phosphor; while in the pieces immediately following, didacticism holds its dull color from page to page till we come to the fire characterizing the " Stanzas on Freedom." If such lines as the last two of this poem and of " Columbus " are possible to other than a poet, still they reveal power of condensation; which is not one of the merits of these early verses generally, and which is of the very pith of poetry, —

> " They are slaves who dare not be
> In the right with two or three."

> " A lavish day! One day, with life and heart,
> Is more than time enough to find a world."

Thus far we find the poetic temperament, but, beyond the mere mechanics, little of the poet's method of interpretation, little to convince us that song is the native form of utterance. The readiness of mind, characteristic of the prose essays, is evidently native; so, too, is the haste, the trust reposed in the moment. Young poets are not expected to master blank verse, but they are supposed to know that, if "second thoughts are prose," first thoughts are often something not so good as prose, —

> "Chances have laws as fixed as planets have,
> And disappointment's dry and bitter root,
> Envy's harsh berries, and the choking pool
> Of the world's scorn, are the right mother-milk
> To the tough hearts that pioneer their kind,
> And break a pathway to those unknown realms
> That in the earth's broad shadow lie enthralled."

We must not omit one quotation, where the didacticism and the consonant endings, rimic in effect, are offset by three noble lines, —

> "The wicked and the weak, by some dark law,
> Have a strange power to shut and rivet down
> Their own horizon round us, to unwing
> Our heaven-aspiring visions, and to blur
> With surly clouds the Future's gleaming peaks,
> Far seen across the brine of thankless years.
> *If the chosen soul could never be alone*
> *In deep mid-silence, open-doored to God,*
> *No greatness ever had been dreamed or done;*
> Among dull hearts a prophet never grew;
> The nurse of full-grown souls is solitude."

The last stanza of "The Present Crisis," often quoted, exhibits representative merits and defects, —

"New occasions teach new duties, Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth;
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must Pilgrims be,
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key."

But when are we coming to the poet? On the very next page. After turning upward of ninety leaves, we open upon "An Indian-Summer Reverie," and — a disclosure somewhat startling — upon perhaps the nearest perfect poem of the length that Lowell has left us. Elsewhere are higher flights, but where in the four volumes is there another poem of the length so thoroughly poetic? —

"The birch, most shy and ladylike of trees,
Her poverty, as best she may, retrieves,
And hints at her foregone gentilities
With some saved relics of her wealth of leaves;
The swamp-oak, with his royal purple on,
Glares red as blood across the sinking sun,
As one who proudlier to a falling fortune cleaves."

Finer still is the rollicking bobolink, captured at a single stroke, —

"Meanwhile that devil-may-care, the bobolink,
Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops
Just ere he sweeps o'er rapture's tremulous brink,
And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops."

Again we have the master touch in the lines,

"The sunshine seems blown off by the bleak wind,
As pale as formal candles lit by day."

We need not dwell on "The Dandelion," "She Came and Went," "The Changeling," and a few other pieces, all of them poetry, all beautiful as they are familiar. We pass them, bearing in mind the small quantity and the excellent quality of the poetry discovered. Lowell says in the prefatory note to this volume, penned in his old age, that he would like to put "a great many pieces" well back, if not out of sight. It is a pity that the white-haired sires of song should be denied so proper a privilege.

One more poem in the volume remains to be noticed, the next to the last, "The Vision of Sir Launfal." From the first eight lines of this poem is felt a poetic breath not breathed again from our home hills and fields, and rarely wafted from the old lands beyond the sea; and, passing on to the twenty-four lines beginning,

"And what is so rare as a day in June?"

one exclaims, "The purest, the sweetest, and at the same time the freshest, strains from any

singer of our soil!" It is a dangerous attempt, the piping of new variations on a theme of Tennyson's, but it is successful in the present instance. The prelude to part second is too fanciful, perhaps, too pretty, for the key set in the masterly beginning; and we would gladly spare the line,

"He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the same,"

also the line,

"And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine."

However, these are faults easily overlooked in a poem which stands next below the "Reverie" in point of perfection of composition, and above it in the points of key and compass.

Of the second volume, containing the incomparable "Biglow Papers," one need not say that here Lowell stands quite alone.

"God makes sech nights, all white an' still
Fur 'z you can look or listen,
Moonshine an' snow on field an' hill,
All silence an' all glisten."

It is a deep disguise, but the shining, eternal angel is within. The first series of the "Biglow Papers" appeared in 1848, when the author was twenty-nine, while the other poems we have glanced at were published when he was twenty-five or twenty-six.

The third volume of this definitive series includes, with earlier work, "Under the Willows," which we first saw when Lowell was in the prime of manhood, about fifty. The tone is mellowed, the gait easier, the style being that of the bright conversationalist of letters and song, —

> "I love to enter pleasure by a postern,
> Not the broad popular gate that gulps the mob."

"The First Snow-Fall," "The Wind Harp," "The Foot-Path," show no progress in art beyond points reached in the short poems previously mentioned; while here and there, as in "Al Fresco," stand passages not surpassed for awkwardness in the hasty days of the early twenties, —

> "O unestrangèd birds and bees!
> O face of Nature always true!
> O never-unsympathizing trees!
> O never-rejecting roof of blue,
> Whose rash disherison never falls
> On us unthinking prodigals,
> Yet who convictest all our ill,
> So grand and unappeasable!"

Regarding the volume "Heartsease and Rue," the last bequest to us, it is sufficient to speak of the poem "Agassiz." As one reads this tribute to the memory of a friend, it is difficult to avoid a comparison with "Thyrsis." Whether or not the comparison be made, one feels at the very

start that the things said so excellently are, after all, of a different order from those that "will not stay unsaid." The impression made is that of an attempt as deliberate as the performance is successful. The conversational tone is uppermost, and in more than one place we have hard reading. The theme is thoroughly masculine, and such lines as these are well up to it, —

> "Teach me those words that strike a solid root
> Within the ears of men;
> Ye chiefly, virile both to think and feel,
> Deep-chested Chapman and firm-footed Ben, —
> For he was masculine from head to heel."

But further on, in a like passage, the man yields to the inventor, —

> "His look, wherever its good-fortune fell,
> Doubled the feast without a miracle."

The Miltonic trilogy of virtues is not exemplified in this ode; which is but another way of saying that we should not point to it as specifically the work of a poet. The intellectual grasp is unquestionable, the vigorous English as well; but the atmosphere, the flavor, the grace, that we must insist on for the admission of song, whether it be dirge or serenade, — whatever else is here, these are wanting. The first stanza of "Thyrsis" makes this only too plain, —

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!
In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same;
The village street its haunted mansion lacks,
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stalks —
Are ye too changed, ye hills!
See, 't is no foot of unfamiliar men
To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays!
Here came I often, often, in old days, —
Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then."

Though we hear much more of the odes than of "The Cathedral," the admirer of the true Lowellian line will find it oftener here than elsewhere in volume four of the verse. There is sense enough in it to stock a common writer for a lifetime, and one passage that not Emerson himself could better; which is to say that it has peculiar virtues not excelled by any poet of our time, —

"One spring I knew as never any since:
All night the surges of the warm southwest
Boomed intermittent through the wallowing elms,
And brought a morning from the Gulf adrift,
Omnipotent with sunshine, whose quick charm
Startled with crocuses the sullen turf
And wiled the bluebird to his whiff of song:
One summer hour abides, what time I perched,
Dappled with noonday, under simmering leaves,
And pulled the pulpy oxhearts, while aloof
An oriole clattered and the robins shrilled,
Denouncing me an alien and a thief:
One morn of autumn lords it o'er the rest,
When in the lane I watched the ash-leaves fall,
Balancing softly earthward without wind,

Or twirling with directer impulse down
On those fallen yesterday, now barbed with frost,
While I grew pensive with the pensive year:
And once I learned how marvellous winter was,
When past the fence-rails, downy-gray with rime,
I creaked adventurous o'er the spangled crust
That made familiar fields seem far and strange
As those stark wastes that whiten endlessly
In ghastly solitude about the pole,
And gleam relentless to the unsetting sun:
Instant the candid chambers of my brain
Were painted with these sovran images;
And later visions seem but copies pale
From those unfading frescos of the past,
Which I, young savage, in my age of flint,
Gazed at, and dimly felt a power in me
Parted from Nature by the joy in her
That doubtfully revealed me to myself.
Thenceforward I must stand outside the gate;
And paradise was paradise the more,
Known once and barred against satiety."

Browning is never more spontaneous, never fresher, and seldom, if ever, so continuously musical. Indeed few have addressed Spring at any time in language fitter to take her maiden heart. And why is not Lowell oftener thus delightful? Ah, the thousand powers that must unite for the birth of perfect song! After all, the poet, like the bluebird, is wiled to his whiff of melody; and if Nature be not propitious, let the blame be upon her. Though much of this poem is hardly more than exalted talk, —

> "I went, and, with the Saxon's pious care,
> First ordered dinner at the pea-green inn,
> The flies and I its only customers," —

the remainder is something far from that, — a rich deposit of wisdom and gladdening prophecy : —

> "Perhaps the deeper faith that is to come
> Will see God rather in the strenuous doubt,
> Than in the creed held as an infant's hand
> Holds purposeless whatso is placed therein."

Finally, as to the odes, about which many have had much to say, and over which we are likely to be disturbed by the patriotic bias. We must beware of that, otherwise we shall not see, for instance, that, in the tribute to Washington, the inspiration that has made famous the eighth and last division of "Under the Old Elm" flags after the eleventh line. Before glancing through the "Commemoration Ode," let us remember that, loose a term as the word "ode" is, and has ever been in our language and practice, we have always insisted on its being a lyrical and spirited as well as a dignified, composition on some worthy theme. There must be high thought, and the high thought must find expression through the poet's method, — the swift, direct method of music and passion. Lowell being comparatively deficient in music and passion, it is natural to suspect that, however complete his triumph in

high thought, the ode will not be the species of composition to reveal him at his best; and so, in the writer's judgment, it proves. There was everything in the theme of the "Commemoration Ode," in the occasion, and in the poet's experience and sympathy, to rouse him to the utmost; but all this will not avail when nature says, "Not quite what I intended." Proud as we are of the odes, especially of the "Commemoration Ode," it is a question how much they advance the claims of Lowell purely as a poet; like Tennyson's dramas, they may be more the record of a last ambition than of a push of nature. Indisputably there is no such mastery of this form as there is in the case of the dialect pastorals, of the idyllic pieces and those of the order of "Credidimus Jovem Regnare." To speak generally, the odes are wanting in emotion, in music. Whether the ode be Pindaric or Horatian, regular or irregular, whatever be the style, high thought must ride on fire and divine sound. In the "Commemoration Ode" we have the high thought, but have not continuously the indefinable, inevitable quality that, for example, makes the following unpretentious lines from Hood's "Ode on Autumn" outweigh in poetic value Taylor's "National Ode" and his "Gettysburg Ode" put in the scales together: —

"The swallows all have wing'd across the main,
But here the Autumn melancholy dwells,
And sighs her tearful spells
Amongst the sunless shadows of the plain.
Alone, alone,
Upon a mossy stone,
She sits and reckons up the dead and gone,
With the last leaves for a love-rosary;
Whilst all the wither'd world looks drearily,
Like a dim picture of the drownèd past
In the hush'd mind's mysterious far-away,
Doubtful what ghostly thing will steal the last
Into that distance, gray upon the gray."

It may be said that comparison cannot be made between poems so different in kind. It can be made, and with profit; for poetry, whatever be the order, is always poetry.

The theme of the "Commemoration Ode" is noble, but, while the composition moves for the most of the way with dignity, it does not move to smitings of the lyre. In the sixth division come twenty-two great lines to Lincoln. Too much cannot be said in praise of these; but after them perhaps only two will be remembered, —

"And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face,
. . . . . .
New birth of our new soil, the first American."

The splendid line,

"And brave old wisdom of sincerity!"

is followed by one that drops to the prosaic region and road of the quadruped and the pack-train, —

> "In that *sure-footed* mind's unfaltering skill."

The seventh division is prosaic; wisdom is present, but not the sort that is bride to immortal verse. The fourth line of division eight,

> "Making the nettle danger soft for us as silk,"

wretched in itself, becomes tenfold more vexing since it is the very last before an outburst of profound personal sorrow. At the twenty-eighth line of the eighth division is a burst of fervor, of the success of which the reader is left to judge on rehearing the lines, —

> "Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
> For never shall their aureoled presence lack;
> I see them muster in a gleaming row,
> With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
> We find in our dull road their shining track;
> In every nobler mood
> We feel the orient of their spirit glow,
> Part of our life's unalterable good,
> Of all our saintlier aspiration;
> They come transfigured back,
> Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
> Beautiful evermore, and with the rays,
> Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!"

It is better to go forward to the twelfth and last division, where we may hear the poet at his best:

"O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!
Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,
And letting thy set lips,
Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,
The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
What words divine of lover or of poet
Could tell our love and make thee know it,
Among the Nations bright beyond compare?
What were our lives without thee?
What all our lives to save thee?
We reck not what we gave thee;
We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare!"

At first thought these splendid lines shame us for the restrictions passed upon their fellows; on second thought, they shame their fellows, not us.

As Coleridge has finely said, music is an integral part of the imagination. The lyric movement in his ode, "France," — let us have a strain of it: —

"Ye Clouds! that far above me float and pause,
Whose pathless march no mortal may control!
Ye Ocean-Waves! that, wheresoe'er ye roll,
Yield homage only to eternal laws!
Ye Woods! that listen to the night-birds singing,
Midway the smooth and perilous slope reclined,
Save when your own imperious branches swinging
Have made a solemn music of the wind!"

Gray's Ode, the "Progress of Poesy," has the integral element, music, has the rapturous movement, —

"Now the rich stream of music winds along,
Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,
Through verdant vales, and Ceres' golden reign;
Now rolling down the steep amain,
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour:
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar."

In Cowley's ode, "The Praise of Pindar," — if we omit the seventh and eighth lines, — the "rich stream" pours on: —

"Whether at Pisa's race he please
To carve in polished verse the conqueror's images;
Whether the swift, the skilful, or the strong
Be crownèd in his nimble, artful, vigorous song;
Whether some brave young man's untimely fate
In words worth dying for he celebrate;
. . . . .
He bids him live and grow in fame,
Among the stars he sticks his name,
The grave can but the dross of him devour,
So small is death's, so great the poet's power."

Even in the strict Horatian ode of Marvell, where the close words and lines are fairly riveted together, there, too, is the rhythmic pliancy, the rise and fall of imperishable melody, of august, invulnerable harmony, —

"The forward youth that would appear,
Must now forsake his muses dear,
Nor in the shadows sing
His numbers languishing.

"'T is time to leave the books in dust
And oil th' unusèd armor's rust,
Removing from the wall
The corselet of the hall.

"So restless Cromwell could not cease
In the inglorious arts of peace,
But through adventurous war
Urgèd his active star:

"And like the three-forked lightning first,
Breaking the clouds where it was nurst,
Did thorough his own side
His fiery way divide."

The music must not be left for the little singers; the greater the poet, the greater the imagination, and the voice of imagination is music. The half-dozen poets whose song is ever on the breath of the world, not only spoke in music, but thought in it. Browning was wont to leave out the music, Lowell was wont to leave it out; but Milton could not speak without its going in, —

"For if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold;
And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould;
And hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day."

Were one to hazard a prophecy, one would say that our splendid, our lamented Lowell, so far as concerns his verse, will be remembered for two brief but noble eulogies of two of the noblest of men, but more particularly as the author of "An

Indian Summer Reverie " and of " The Vision of Sir Launfal " ; and perhaps before these for that matchless variation of the voice of rustic love wherein the wild rose, Hulda, sits blushing to the brook forever.

IV.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

N coming of age, Whittier, a shy, self-taught farmer boy, found himself, not, like a brother singer at even an earlier age, in a college chair of modern languages, but most prosaically seated in the editorial chair of the "American Manufacturer." Unpromising as was the outlook for poetry, the young editor was hardly out of place there; for, as became a scion of his stock, he proved himself nimble-witted, many-handed. Piper or politician, as the mood took him, he was one hour the gentlest of Quakers, the next the stiffest of fellows for a fight. The contradictions were only in seeming, for the greatest poets have put country and duty before song; and though one call himself a Quaker, Nature has the first and final say as to what he is and shall be.

Whittier's bent toward poetry is shown in the early turning to it; and the man, the citizen, the patriot, is shown in the turning away from it the moment there was something on hand of

greater importance. While the lad was a champion of the red man and an ardent lover of nature, and would fain sing of these, the impulse was instantly checked for the stern task of battle against wrong and oppression. The love of right and freedom — this was to be the governing power. If it pointed to sunshine and song, to ease and homage, be it so; if it pointed to darkness and the cry of pain, to ostracism and mobbery, it was well. Either way, it mattered not, he stood ready, assured of the end, —

> "The curse of earth's gray morning is
> The blessing of its noon."

When one thoroughly honest and competent to judge himself, offers us the key to his life, we cannot accept it too readily. Whittier's words are, "I have never staked all on the chances of authorship." He goes further than this: the verses up to the age of almost threescore are styled "simply episodical." Whittier knew himself from the beginning, and was his own best critic whether as a man or a poet. When he threw himself heart and soul into the antislavery struggle, he knew that he was setting his face away from art; a thing which another "American" and "poet of democracy" did not dream he was doing when the sound of his every step was a violent reminder. The outcome was in no

wise doubtful: our "Kosmos," lounging among the flowers, was not suffered to pluck them, while our mailed and visored Quaker has, in the pauses of the onset, snatched here and there a fadeless blossom. Such is the meed of the hero-poet; and hero and poet, if America has produced either, was this very man, this friend of freedom, this foe of the oppressor.

We all know so well what business it was that filled the strong, active days, what absorbed the whole man until the time of gray hairs, that America has not in her literature lines which touch her more than the couplet, written in 1856, —

> "Oh, not of choice, for themes of public wrong
> I leave the green and pleasant paths of song."

But the song must stand or fall by itself, we must not confuse the minstrel with the man. Flowers we shall find before the year 1865, when poetry became the vocation; such flowers, however, as grow high above the quiet valley, up among the rocks, tossed by the warring winds.

With "Mogg Megone" and the other early verses relegated to the appendix of the seven-volume edition of Whittier's works, we will stay but for brief illustration of the poetic instinct. Among the echoes of Scott and Byron comes, now and then, an accent like this, —

> "He knew the rock with its fingering vine,
> And its gray top touch'd by the slant sunshine."

The open-air freedom characteristic of the later work is discoverable in the prophecy of Mogg Megone, that he will possess Ruth, the outlaw's daughter, —

> "But the fawn of the Yengees shall sleep on my breast,
> And the bird of the clearing shall sing in my nest";

while in "The Sicilian Vespers" we note the vividness and swing natural to the balladist, —

> "The startled monks thronged up,
> In the torch-light cold and dim;
> And the priest let fall his incense-cup,
> And the virgin hushed her hymn."

The early pieces establish, moreover, an instinctive preference for home matter. Whittier, ending as he began, began as a singer of his native New England sod. The traditions of the valley of the Merrimac, which he took in with the mother-milk, never quite go out of mind; while the hills and rivers of Essex vie with momentous problems of reform in the steady press for utterance. The man with a mission is, of course, omnipresent from the start. Four lines of the second poem of volume four, verses to a fellow-toiler in the cause of freedom, might well have been addressed to the author himself, —

"We will think of thee, O brother!
And thy sainted name shall be
In the blessing of the captive,
And the anthem of the free."

Poetry is the episode; art is not the aim, —

"Art builds on sand; the works of pride
And human passion change and fall;
But that which shares the life of God
With Him surviveth all."

This favorite sentiment is repeated in the lines written for Bryant's birthday, —

"Thank God! his hand on Nature's keys
Its cunning keeps at life's full span;
But, dimmed and dwarfed, in times like these,
The poet seems beside the man!"

Much has been said of the scarcity of books in the little Quaker household; but Indian legends, tales of Puritan persecution, "Pilgrim's Progress," and Burns's poems were not all. The Bible was there; and few are the many pages of this poet where is not made good the saying of Coleridge, that the Bible is sufficient for the acquiring of style. In substance and in setting, the Bible lies at the bottom of Whittier's art; the faith, the fervor, the simplicity and sensuousness of the ancient Hebrew are unremittingly his.

In passing, busy investigators, of the blood of them that tell the number of knots in Hercules's

club, have given Whittier a period of "storm and stress." It remains only to prove "Maud Muller," "The Tent on the Beach," and "Snow-Bound" a trilogy with an immense undermeaning, and Whittier, too, will be among the incomprehensibles. Such questioning of his soul as he makes, results in no utterance darker than this, —

> "O friend! no proof beyond this yearning,
> This outreach of our hearts, we need;
> God will not mock the hope He giveth,
> No love He prompts shall vainly plead."

A distinguished critic laments Whittier's turning from the quiet scenes of the hearthside and of the home fields,

> "Making his rustic reed of song
> A weapon in the war with wrong."

Few, probably, share the sentiment; the many feeling, on the other hand, that, excellent as the "homely idyls" and "summer pastorals" of the after days prove, too much cannot be said in praise of the judgment that deferred these till the fire and irony, the tenderness and invective, of the "Voices of Freedom" should have helped to work out their great purpose, until the prayers of the patriot should have been answered, and his hope satisfied. The country has certainly been the gainer, and one questions the loss to song. Whittier's range is not wide; he has gone

the ground over, and perhaps no other preparation than that chosen could have served better as a prelude to the last happy work, —

> "[The] free and pleasant thoughts, chance sown,
> Like feathers on the wind."

If Whittier was by nature and training fitted to sing the life and nature of New England, he was equally equipped for the "war with wrong"; and in this, the stormier field, there was none to stand beside him, his voice had no second in those dark days.

> "Leave studied wit and guarded phrase
> For those who think but do not feel;
> Let men speak out in words which raise,
> Where'er they fall, an answering blaze,
> Like flints which strike the fire from steel."

Such was the voice, — the only voice in America that could blend with Garrison's in the battle for the slave.

> "Lift again the stately emblem on the Bay State's rusted shield,
> Give to Northern winds the Pine Tree on our banner's tattered field.
> Sons of men who sat in council with their Bibles round the board,
> Answering England's royal missive with a firm, 'Thus saith the Lord!'
> Rise again for home and freedom! set the battle in array!
> What the fathers did of old time we their sons must do to-day."

The effect of a trumpet blast like this at the momentous time when it was sounded is sufficient justification for forgetting all the rules of art save those that go to the sounding of it. Whether it be the torrent of scorn poured on the "paid hypocrites" in their "tasselled pulpits," or the wail of the broken-hearted slave-mother for her daughters sold into bondage, — whatever haps to the fane of poesy, the temple of freedom is ringed to the spire-tip with fire as of the lightning. Two things worked greatly to Whittier's advantage in the "war with wrong," — he had the prophet's fire, and he had not too much scholarship. Most of the pieces written, not for the future and for the author, but for the hour and for the cause, have little attraction now; still, while there are few notable poems among them, there are many choice lines and not a few fine stanzas. The "Song of Slaves in the Desert," with a new metre, for Whittier, and a haunting quality, "At Port Royal," and "The Pine Tree" are among the antislavery pieces; there, too, are "Randolph of Roanoke" and "Massachusetts to Virginia," —

"Wild are the waves which lash the reefs along St. George's bank;
Cold on the shore of Labrador the fog lies white and dank;

Through storm, and wave, and blinding mist, stout are
the hearts which man
The fishing-smacks of Marblehead, the sea-boats of
Cape Ann."

As in the antislavery poems, so in the hurried addresses to heroes and martyrs which make the bulk of volume four, it is not always poetry, not always

"The angel utterance of an upright mind."

There is no question about the upright mind; but the "angel utterance," — how could we expect one who was not trying for it to hold to that when all on the long list of song, making it the constant endeavor, have failed so often? When it comes to the verses which serve as brief respites from the effort of the harsher strains, the charm of New England scenery is depicted in the manner native to the poet; while occasionally is to be met a touch reminiscent of Keats or of Wordsworth.

"Even as the great Augustine
Questioned earth and sea and sky,
And the dusty tomes of learning
And old poesy."

That is Keats-like; and the Wordsworthian flavor is unmistakable in the closing lines of "Lucy Hooper," —

"The sunset light of autumn eves
Reflecting on the deep, still floods,
Clouds, crimson sky, and trembling leaves
Of rainbow-tinted woods,
These, in our view, shall henceforth take
A tenderer meaning for thy sake;
And all thou lovedst of earth and sky
Seem sacred to thy memory."

"The Hill-Top," too, though wholly Whittier's, recalls the bard of Rydal. Here and there, coming upon choice stanzas like the one in "Burns," —

"Not his the song whose thunderous chime
Eternal echoes render;
The mournful Tuscan's haunted rhyme,
And Milton's starry splendor!" —

one regrets that there are not more such. Ours is all the regret; the old author bethought him of other laurels, prouder than ever poet wore.

In the last half of volume three are the "Songs of Labor." The author, writing of things of which he is a part, exhibits quite another sort of authorship than the cataloguing of the various kinds of labor that drift into the ken of the professional idler while observing a spear of grass. If our laboring class have had anything written to or about them that they — or their employers, for that matter — can recognize as approximating representative expression, it is to be found in such lines as these: —

"From the hill-top looks the steeple,
And the lighthouse from the sand;
And the scattered pines are waving
Their farewell from the land.
One glance, my lads, behind us,
For the homes we leave one sigh,
Ere we take the change and chances
Of the ocean and the sky."

"Ho! strike away the bars and blocks,
And set the good ship free!
Why lingers on these dusty rocks
The young bride of the sea?
Look! how she moves adown the grooves,
In graceful beauty now!
How lowly on the breast she loves
Sinks down her virgin prow!"

To such verses we point all friends across the seas that wish to know something of the work of our soil. Would they know how our corn grows?

"All through the long, bright days of June,
Its leaves grew green and fair,
And waved in hot midsummer's noon
Its soft and yellow hair."

Would they hear a voice from our hills?

"And a music wild and solemn,
From the pine-tree's height,
Rolls its vast and sea-like volume
On the wind of night."

New England is not America, but it is the corner of America that our poets have favored;

and such American life and manners and landscape as the muses have seen fit to sanction are to be found mainly in the work of Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell.

It is said that Whittier is restricted to the hills and valleys of his birth-spot; and it is said, again, that Whitman, of all our poets, is the one to voice the sea. The first statement needs qualification; the second, something more thorough.

"Now rest we, where this grassy mound
His feet hath set
In the great waters, which have bound
His granite ankles greenly round
With long and tangled moss, and weeds with cool spray wet."

". . . Just then the ocean seemed
To lift a half-faced moon in sight;
And, shoreward, o'er the waters gleamed,
From crest to crest, a line of light,
Such as of old, with solemn awe,
The fishers by Gennesaret saw,
Where dry-shod o'er it walked the Son of God,
Tracking the waves with light where'er his sandals trod."

. . . . . .

"And prayer is made, and praise is given,
By all things near and far;
The ocean looketh up to heaven,
And mirrors every star;

"Its waves are kneeling on the strand,
As kneels the human knee,
Their white locks bowing to the sand,
The priesthood of the sea."

"I draw a freer breath, I seem
Like all I see —
Waves in the sun, the white-winged gleam
Of sea-birds in the slanting beam,
And far-off sails which flit before the south wind free.

"So when time's veil shall fall asunder,
The soul may know
No fearful change, nor sudden wonder,
Nor sink the weight of mystery under,
But with the upward rise, and with the vastness grow.

"And all we shrink from now may seem
No new revealing;
Familiar as our childhood's stream,
Or pleasant memory of a dream
The loved and cherished Past upon the new life stealing."

Seeking "the breath of a new life," are we to pass such movements for the flittings of the he-bird and the she-bird, and other mystic broken-wingedness and broken-mindedness in the opening piece of the "Sea-Drift" division of "Leaves of Grass"?

Again, is the search for representative American poetry to end in this? —

"A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,
A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,
A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;

At home on Kanadian snowshoes or up in the bush,
or with fishermen off Newfoundland,
At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest
and tacking,
At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of
Maine, or the Texan ranch,
Comrade of Californians, comrade of free Northwest-
erners (loving their big proportions)."

The muses are more merciful: —

"Behind the scared squaw's birch canoe,
The steamer smokes and raves;
And city lots are staked for sale
Above old Indian graves.

"I hear the tread of pioneers
Of nations yet to be;
The first low wash of waves, where soon
Shall roll a human sea.

"The rudiments of empire here
Are plastic yet and warm;
The chaos of a mighty world
Is rounding into form!

"Each rude and jostling fragment soon
Its fitting place shall find, —
The raw material of a State,
Its muscle and its mind!"

For the "poet of democracy," the muses point still to our soldier-poet, singing between the blasts of the trumpet, —

"Not from the shallow babbling fount
Of vain philosophy thou art;
He who of old on Syria's Mount
Thrilled, warmed, by turns, the listener's heart,

"In holy words which cannot die,
In thoughts which angels leaned to know,
Proclaimed thy message from on high,
Thy mission to a world of woe.

"That voice's echo hath not died!
From the blue lake of Galilee,
And Tabor's lonely mountain-side,
It calls a struggling world to thee.

"Thy name and watchword o'er this land
I hear in every breeze that stirs,
And round a thousand altars stand
Thy banded party worshippers."

In the first volume of his collected works we find Whittier in a favorite field. Here, among the familiar poems first published under the title "Ballads of New England," are "Telling the Bees," and "My Playmate," replete with pure pathos, with human interest the most close and tender; "The Wreck of Rivermouth" and the other direct, spirited narratives leading on to the brisk bit of novelty, "Skipper Ireson's Ride." The simplest measures, adorned chiefly by the beauty of thought, spontaneous as bird-songs, straight from the heart and to the heart, — such are these poems, the fame of which far enough exceeds the ambition of the author.

Some one has regretted the lack of display of the poet's inner life: but could there be a better showing of this than the steady under-

current of high, invincible spirit pervading, ay, prompting every line? There is no need of explicit announcement of this and that; the soul of the man and the music of the poet flower together, telling their story plainly and sweetly as do the blossoms of the native fields and byways.

Whittier is somewhat inflexible, stiff; but so was Wordsworth. While with both it is a stub-born defect, it yields to the rich inheritance of spirit that refuses to be held; that, despite all bonds, will leap in the freedom of the mountain brook, take the sunshine, and run with grace and music down into the valley where wake and sleep, where toil and rest, the multitude of the children of men. Patient endurance, self-sacrifice, all the mind and heart devoted to a high cause, — this is the soil from which the fadeless flowers of song have always blown, and from which they will forever blow. In the guard kept at the post of duty for a term of years that must suffice the most of us for a lifetime, in the long solemn watch upon the jeopardy of a mighty cause, — in this deep past of the patriot lies the secret of Whittier's choicer poems, simple, heartfelt, sweet as the light and air.

> "So fall the weary years away;
> A child again, my head I lay
> Upon the lap of this sweet day."

The simple faith, the trust and repose of the child; this, after the toil, the trial as by fire, of that small band of immortals that stood for the inalienable birthright of man. It is, indeed,

> ". . . the ample air of hope,
> And memory's sunset gold."

As has been said, Whittier is somewhat stiff. He is also provincial; but he has his lifts into universality as surely as certain things in the human heart hold, world over. If the bleakness of the old Haverhill birth-spot is on many a page, a goodly number lie in the warmer light everywhere recognized and rejoiced in. The simplest forms of verse structure are the rule; but there is, too, freedom of melody that no mere master of metres can hope to waken. There is, moreover, originality of a higher order than that of intricate technics, — the originality of simplicity. Simplest words, for example, catch the spirit of the cold: —

> "He comes, — he comes, — the Frost Spirit comes! on the rushing Northern blast,
> And the dark Norwegian pines have bowed as his fearful breath went past."

If the imagination be more intense, still the simplicity is preserved: —

> "Fair scenes! whereto the Day and Night
> Make rival love, I leave ye soon,
> What time before the eastern light
> The pale ghost of the setting moon

"Shall hide behind yon rocky spines,
And the young archer, Morn, shall break
His arrows on the mountain pines,
And, golden-sandalled, walk the lake!"

Rare in our poetry are four choicer lines of description than the stanza, a little farther on, —

"How rising moons shine sad and mild
On wooded isle and silvering bay;
Or setting suns beyond the piled
And purple mountains lead the day."

Nor is it Nature alone that Whittier can portray. Which of our artists could better the miniature of Emerson? —

"He who might Plato's banquet grace,
Have I not seen before me sit,
And watched his Puritanic face,
With more than Eastern wisdom lit?
Shrewd mystic! who, upon the back
Of his Poor Richard's Almanac,
Writing the Suffi's song, the Gentoo's dream,
Links Manu's age of thought to Fulton's age of steam!"

And Longfellow alone, among us, has matched the grace of the prelude to "Miriam," —

"I, called from dream and song,
Thank God! so early to a strife so long,
That, ere it closed, the black, abundant hair
Of boyhood rested silver-sown and spare
On manhood's temples, now at sunset-shine
Tread with fond feet the path of morning time.

And if perchance too late I linger where
The flowers have ceased to blow, and trees are bare,
Thou, wiser in thy choice, wilt scarcely blame
The friend who shields his folly with thy name."

The same may be said of the dedication of the "Countess"; and there is something behind these lines, a solid support, that it was not the privilege of the more favored singer to lean against.

Perhaps we do not see Whittier quite as he is. Deficient in the enchantment possible only to the highest order of genius, somewhat bald, somewhat crude and narrow, impatient of revision, so careless that he can rhyme "banner" with "Susquehanna," and "cotton" with "fortune," so reckless, indeed, as to try to force "onward" and "looking" into a union of sweet sound, — this is one side of the equation; but what is the other? If he leads his contemporaries in faults, he leads them also in the primal virtues of simplicity, sinew, enthusiasm, and spontaneity. With less imagination and with but a fraction of the learning, a tithe of the versatility, of Lowell, he is more direct and telling. The Quaker poet, far more than Lowell, was the poetic power of his time. With as much imagination as Longfellow, he has more grip and fire; unequal to him as an artist, he has qualities even rarer than the instinct of form, — enthusiasm and spon-

taneity. Deficient in imagination, again, as compared with Bryant, he has fervor and the lyric gift. While Bryant is letting his imagination wing serenely over the world and the fate of the race, Whittier catches, at a stroke, some happy expression on the face of Nature, sets into instant vibration heart-strings that suffer the breath of the elder bard to pass over them without a tremor. While Bryant is spreading his energy, thinning it on the long stretch, Whittier is husbanding his for the one decisive thrust to the quick. In short, by means of the first poetic virtues, — simplicity, enthusiasm, and virility, by the virtues of temperament and voice that take the heart, perhaps Whittier is not only the representative American poet, but a poet as sure as any among us to endure. When the gold of his work has been cleared of the dross by one who shall be to him what Arnold was to Wordsworth, it is among the possibilities that the result will be a contribution to poetry as characteristic and lasting as America has produced. There will be neither the soaring of Bryant, the subtile penetration, the indescribable flavor of Emerson, the scholastic finish, the literary art of Longfellow, nor the reaches that in a few instances ally Lowell with the immortals; but there may be a residuum strong against the assault of time.

Of the two poets of this country that have

been read, really read, it is Whittier, not Longfellow, that has drawn to him our sturdy class, our "hard-headed." Whittier's strong commonsense, his granitic pith and aphoristic snap, commend him to such minds: —

> "We sigh above our crowded nets
> For fish that never swam."

It is not the wisdom simply; the idea is run in the mold of common things, it is part and parcel of every-day life. The author worked and rested, thought and dreamed, with the people, — his own people, whom he knew from the quiet of the hearthside through all moods up to the frenzy of the mob. The toil and amusements, the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of the common lot, — these and the natural scenes, familiar as family faces, are the staple of his song; while the language is of workaday words, moving to the music of the lyre.

As for quality of depiction, poor Bloomfield with his kodak, Crabbe with his dreary realism, his pest-house fidelity, and Thomson with his awkward, sprawling honesty, how far-off are these in method from this new-world bard! These are outside the picture, while Whittier, like Cowper, is in the picture, only much deeper; his heart and imagination inform the shapes and colors, he builds and glows with the enthusiasm and affec-

tion that reached full development in Wordsworth. While Longfellow is a surer artist, the best verse of Whittier has a certain advantage over the smoother work of Longfellow; this for the same reason that the best verse of Cowper throws the odds in his favor when we turn to it from the glossy levels of "Goldy."

"She came and stood in the Old South Church,
A wonder and a sign,
With a look the old-time sibyls wore,
Half-crazed and half-divine:

. . . .

"'Thus saith the Lord, with equal feet
All men my courts shall tread,
And priest and ruler no more shall eat
My people up like bread!'"

"No Berserk thirst of blood had they,
No battle-joy was theirs, who set
Against the alien bayonet
Their homespun breasts in that old day.

. . . . .

"Their death-shot shook the feudal tower,
And shattered slavery's chain as well;
On the sky's dome, as on a bell,
Its echo struck the world's great hour."

Such stanzas, and such descriptive hits as

"The locust by the wall
Stabs the noon-silence with his sharp alarm,"

are quite common with Whittier; and the directness and strength there, the yeoman's nerve and

sinew, we never think of looking for in Longfellow.

The Nature in Whittier is the Nature that shows to the eye of the heart as well as to the eye of the mind; while the men and the women are such beings as find their right place in it, — never floating in mid-air, never any nearer heaven than the mother ground gets to fairydom: —

> "Here dwells no perfect man sublime,
> Nor woman winged before her time,
> But with the faults and follies of the race,
> Old home-bred virtues hold their not unhonored place."

It may be objected that the sturdy class, the "hard-headed," — the one class specified, — are not the tribunal to sit in the case of poetry. But it is auspicious for the fame of a poet to have an admixture of these with the softer sort, whose trend is toward sentimentality. However, let us not lay too much stress on the "practical," common-sense element; for while it lies at the bottom of Whittier's work, it is not more conspicuous than the emotion. Indeed, does not Whittier aim first at the heart?

Lest it be thought that the patriot is put in the place of the poet, the exceptional man and citizen in the place of the indifferent minstrel; lest it be thought that the bonds of poesy are being drawn to fit one who, though he may be the peer of a poet, is not pre-eminently a poet, — be

it said, finally, that Whittier's verse fulfils the Miltonic requirement: it is simple, sensuous, and passionate. Moreover, no man has it faster in mind than has Whittier, that "the office of poetry in the modern world is still its ancient office of deliverance." He holds to the old notion of poetry, and exemplifies it as clearly as any singer of his time. He is, of all our poets, the born lyrist, the master of pathos, of rugged strength and invective, and he stands second only to Longfellow as a story-teller. If "Hiawatha" comes first as a contribution to general literature, "Snow-Bound" shares with the "Biglow Papers" the honor of the first place in the literature of the white man's America.

All Whittier's shortcomings admitted, he is a stanch poet; despite his limitations as an executant, he is an artist. In whatever nook of his loved New England the muse seeks him out,

> "Sweet airs of love and home, the hum
> Of household melodies,
> Come singing, as the robins come
> To sing in door-yard trees."

From none of our poets do we hear oftener

> "The voice of God in leaf and breeze."

Bryant is more imaginative and stately, Longfellow superior in the points of high breeding and finish, Emerson in seminal power, in the

mystic might of the seer, while Lowell, in his rarer passages, all but catches the accent of the masters; but it would be rash to affirm that the costlier fabric of any of these will outlive the homespun of the blessed old saint militant of Amesbury, to whom right and his country were as wife and child.

V.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

IN birth, in prosperity, in health and happiness, in length of years, — in all these was Longfellow blest. Favored of gods and men, his very disposition was a boon seldom accorded to mortals; and the events of his life seem one unfaltering effort to continue the first benevolence. All that one could ask at the hands of heaven and of his fellow-men this gentle poet received. His native powers were fostered by every attention from within and from without; he and fortune worked together, and complete development was assured. A born man of letters, a born singer, encouraged in every way to guide his willing instinct to the highest reach of culture, a stranger from birth to the struggle for bread, happy in his home life, called to just the positions for which he was fitted, and called at the nick of time, advancing by swift degrees from the most popular of professors to the most popular of poets; widely

known, widely loved, — surely here is a son of man to be envied.

Thrice happy maker and vender of melodies! his verse, every line of it, accepted while the author was still in the greenest of the teens; never an objection to the offerings of his muse from either publisher or reader until so late that objection was futile, productive of nothing unless it was the suggestion of impotent grudging.

So complete was Longfellow's success that one cannot approach him in a critical spirit without fancying a kindly shade rising before him with a smile rather of wonder than of reproof, as much as to say, "Brother, why put yourself to the trouble? The world has been answering you, point by point and year by year, ever since the dawn of song upon the workaday dark of our wondrous young land." Really, it would seem that the critic has very little to do with Longfellow. To separate and analyze his verses is very much like pulling apart the summer, hour by hour, or flower by flower, knowing only too well the while that, whatever we may say of these things, combined as they were, God made the summer, the glad time for every creature with a heart to beat and feel.

Does one intrench one's self behind the technics, talk learnedly of hexameters and trochaics, "But," comes answer, "behold 'Hiawatha' and

'Evangeline.'" Does one run up the colors of foreign influence, "But," comes answer, "'Hyperion,' 'Kavanagh,' 'The Courtship of Miles Standish,' 'Hiawatha,' 'Evangeline,' — both the prose and the poetry, both the early and the mature work, were written by one of the soil to be read and re-read by the thousands of the soil." Does one bring to bear the guns of passivity, lack of depth, want of strength and verve, "But," comes answer, "what is wiser than submission, what profit fret and rage and despair? Whether for the living or for the singing of life, wherein may we better qualify ourselves than by restraint, by hiding the discord and discontent, disclosing only the harmony and peace? Does it not show depth of thought and feeling when one so probes into life as to find it vain for man to struggle with the eternal mystery; to find that, whatever appearances may be, the world is what the old prophets found it, — beautiful, good? And where shall strength, ay, strength coupled with skill, be found, if not in one that, in order to support and adorn this finding, has drawn with exquisite scholarship, with an unfailing instinct for the beautiful, not only from the life about him, but from the life of all lands; has drawn from all sources, — from the savage and from the man of fullest culture, from the old time and from the new, — and has so delivered the message that it

has sunk into the souls of his fellows as the rain sinks into the dry ground? And verve even, is it not to be found in 'The Skeleton in Armor,' in 'The Leap of Roushan Beg,' in the 'Ballad of the French Fleet,' and in 'The White Czar'? Right-spirited, too, are 'The Wraith of Odin' and 'King Olaf's Christmas.'" Make one more rally, raise the old battle-cry of commonplace, "But," comes answer, "by commonplace you evidently mean what the world can understand and love, can be interested in, can profit by, can live by. Commonplace is your label for the work universally found interesting, helpful, beautiful, and abiding."

And so we might go on indefinitely. Nevertheless, it is our duty now and then to approach Longfellow in the critical spirit; for he, like every other poet, is at last but a special phase, an impersonal phenomenon, of the art of song. If art is, as we have found it, an inheritance, and the great artists of all times and lands are governed by the same elementary rules, however they may vary in the individual exercise of them, — we should occasionally recall the elementary rules, and see wherein Longfellow has obeyed or disobeyed them; we should inquire if he really is one of the anointed.

The elementary demands of poetry set us to recalling, first, fit matter; second, clearness, sim-

plicity, imagination, passion, music, as essentials of expression. Longfellow's instinct for poetic matter is overwhelmingly evident; his hand fell on it as by sheer gravitation. Good hunter that he was, he had but to take his station, and the game came to him from the four corners of the world. The matter captured, compassionate expression would not be left behind. This is as it must be with the whole poet; so it was with Longfellow.

Among the essentials of poetic expression, we cannot go amiss in naming, first, clearness. Whatever Longfellow tried to say, he said. At first blush, this may not seem a remarkable victory; but giants have striven to win it, and gone down, miserably overthrown. With clearness Longfellow united simplicity; indisputably, too, he was gifted with the magic accent, the witching cadence, with music.

Coming, now, to the grand features of imagination and passion, our commendation must be qualified. Imagination Longfellow certainly had, but the prose of his life-long friend, Hawthorne, shows that its place among his many gifts is not first. The sweep of Longfellow's imagination is restricted, so to speak, in the movement up and down. Sublimity, profundity — these are out of its way; but on the long level sweep, there it is unflagging; and the sureness and endurance go

not a little way toward offsetting the daring vaults and plunges of the few whose might we style "divine." Longfellow cannot awe and amaze us, cannot snatch us up to heights undreamed; but he can lift us well above the ground, for tranquil travel through regions of unbroken charm.

We must speak guardedly on the point of passion also. While the passion of Longfellow is not intense, it is always at command; we journey in a summer glow, in grateful, ripening warmth. Longfellow's heart, if not leaping, is large; the life current, though slow, is full. If we find Whittier freer of the books, closer to the heart of Nature, more penetratingly tender at times, as in "In School Days," more terrible, as in "Ichabod"; if Longfellow is unequal to such a *tour de force* of manhood as "My Triumph," — we remember that the inspiration of the dear old Quaker-warrior is more fitful, that the bleak tracts are more frequent.

The deficiency in quality of imagination and in quantity of passion admitted, the censors may be right, too, in finding Longfellow somewhat too bookish, too ready to take things second-hand, and unduly inclined toward didacticism. But let us look a little closer into these charges. It is possible to be a poet, yes, a great poet, and at the same time be bookish; there is no doing away with Milton. So wide was Longfellow's

range of scholarship, and so sure was his instinct for selection, that we may well pardon any lack of originality that he may exhibit. There is borrowing and borrowing. Longfellow did not borrow his individuality of presentation; he did not borrow the secret that enabled him to speak to the heart and mind of his people and of the civilized world. In the mastery of this secret he stands with a very small company about him; a position indicating true originality, and enough of it to set against a long list of deficiencies.

Again, there is a chance for a detracting stroke on the point of didacticism. Overbearing didacticism is perhaps the one misfortune of Longfellow's inheritance. The old Puritan blood, elsewhere beneficent in its action, here works against him as an artist. Clear as his sight was for every shape and hue of loveliness, the Puritan film would gather, when on must go the ugly tag. Still, there is this to be said: if we are to be put to school before the poet has done with us, no master may be more easily forgiven this particular infirmity than the gentle singer in whose class we find ourselves at this hour.

Reference has been made to the sureness of Longfellow's instinct in tracing right matter, and of his ability to treat it when found. It must be said, however, that to find the expression worthy of

the matter we must take it as a whole. Off-hand work, easy, breezy though it be, is sure, when it comes to detail, to prove defective. Longfellow's artistic sense saves him in the wholeness of impression, which is the main thing; but more than this must go to the making of the consummate workman, of the master artist. Examined in detail, the work of Longfellow is so uneven as to surprise one who has simply met the romancer on his own generous terms, hearing rather with heart than head. Beautiful, for instance, as "Evangeline" is in spirit and in general inspiration, one has but to catch the opening accents of that poem wafted from across the sea,

> "Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm,
> And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands,"

to learn that the tender, captivating tale of Acadie is not, first and last, a work of art.

We have found, too, that Longfellow has the gift of music. True, but here again we must speak of the general impression, we must not listen measure by measure; nor may we hope to hear the poet's most exquisite melodies, the ravishing harmonies. Longfellow, gentle, refined, as he was, could not overcome a certain crudity, a looseness, not hard for the lover of perfect art to forgive, but hard to overlook. Yes, while the critic finds Longfellow a whole poet, with right

matter and becoming expression, while he finds him thoroughly readable, he finds, too, that he falls short of the high ideal of the poet. And could this be otherwise with one whose heart always leaned against the heart of the masses, with one through and through of the people? Indeed, could one who was so warm a lover of his kind wish to have it otherwise?

There are those that think that the people read, that they know and love, pure poetry; it is a beautiful delusion. The comprehension of high art, and the affection for it, are restricted to a very few. So true is this, and so great is the importance of poetry in the common walks of life, that one feels like flinging away the critic's robe, accounting it as rags, in the presence of a poet with the master secret of getting himself read. Here is Longfellow's power, here is his genius; here may he divide honors with the greatest in the commanding line of song.

But, all the adverse counts in, Longfellow is an artist; in a way he is our best story-teller since Chaucer. Never so slipshod as Byron, he exhibits more taste than Byron in his choice of themes. He has points of superiority, too, over Tennyson and Morris, — over Tennyson, since he never forgets the inactivity, the heaviness, of the common mind, the mind most in need of the ministry of song; over Morris, since he recognizes the limits

of endurance of his vast clientage, so difficult to serve and at the same time maintain allegiance to austere, jealous art.

Nor does the critic's concession to Longfellow, as an artist, stop here. Exception may be taken to details of the mass of his work, but this does not prove incapacity for an occasional performance well-nigh perfect. The two sonnets introducing "Inferno,"

"Oft have I seen at some cathedral door,"

and

"How strange the sculptures that adorn these towers!"

and the second sonnet introducing "Purgatorio,"

"With snow-white veil and garments as of flame,"—

if any perfect poems have been written in America, these are among them. And where else shall we place "Curfew," "The Arrow and the Song," "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year," and a few others? The "Skeleton in Armor," "King Witlaf's Drinking-Horn," the "Wreck of the Hesperus,"—these are models of spirited workmanship. It is a deft hand, too, that can pen verse light and charming as the piece "To the River Yvette," and the airy translation, familiar as our own names, "Beware." And few are the poets able to hold the even excellence of the volumes, "Tales of a Wayside Inn," "Evangeline,"

and "Hiawatha"; not to reckon in the prelude to "The Tales," perhaps the most finished composition of the length to be found on the pages of our home writers.

While "Hiawatha" — first among American additions to literature — and the admirable translation of Dante, would, of themselves, give the author an enviable place, Longfellow's is a much richer meed. A born benefactor of his kind, Longfellow was the first to bring us, as a people, under the spell of beauty, to lift us into the sweet serene air of the higher life; and still must we look mainly to him to hold us where he alone could place us. The master poets sound down through other mouths, which tone their high accents to the acceptance of the common ear; but this poet speaks directly, infuses his soul without help or hindrance directly into the great soul of the world; and because of this, assuredly one does not err in claiming for him greatness, — greatness of an order by itself, an order all but his own.

VI.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

PERHAPS we have poets enough now, but how close the escape from more of them! A few additional points of time and circumstance in his favor, and the far-away fighter Freneau would to-day be a familiar voice. The hand that penned "The Indian Burying-Ground" and "The Heroes of Eutaw," like that of Idris, had higher cunning than the holding of the sword. Side by side with that of the soldier, the ghost of the bard glides toward us, in his shadowy hand a blossom of wild honeysuckle, —

> "From morning suns and evening dews
> At first thy little being came;
> If nothing once, you nothing lose,
> For when you die you are the same:
> The space between is but an hour,
> The frail duration of a flower."

Again, a few friendly lifts, and scholarly Sands would be abreast with Whittier in his early

work; "Mogg Megone" would have a rival in "Yamoyden," —

> "Beyond the hill the spirit sleeps,
> His watch the power of evil keeps;
> The Spirit of fire has sought his bed,
> The sun, the hateful sun, is dead.
> Profound and clear is the sounding wave,
> In the chambers of the Wakon-cave;
> Darkness its ancient portals keeps,
> And there the spirit sleeps, — he sleeps."

And the young author of "A Health," had not he, too, germs of poesy that in a kinder season would have come to substantial blossoming? He also saw the poetic potency of the soil, or he had never chanced on that dusk beauty of the wild, —

> "But not a flower lies breathing there
> Sweet as herself, or half as fair —
> Exchanging lustre with the sun,
> A part of day she strays —
> A glancing, living, human smile,
> On Nature's face she plays."

Another early piper of the new world, Brainard, born to the realm of dreams yet never to enjoy the promised inheritance, sends his gentle spirit down to us in the Nature-song beginning, —

> "I saw two clouds at morning
> Tinged with the rising sun;
> And in the dawn they floated on,
> And mingled into one:
> I thought that morning cloud was blest,
> It moved so sweetly to the west."

Lines of so simple and subtile beauty as those of his "Revery" are not any too common among artists that, by reason of a more propitious hour, make their fair colors fast: —

"Yes, there are thoughts that have no sound — such thoughts
That no coined phrase of words can utter them —
The tongue would syllable their shapes in vain —
The cautious pen, even in a master's hand,
Finds nothing at its point to mark them with.
No earthly note can touch these airy chords;
'T is silent music — indescribable.
We hear it when the ear is shut, and see
Its beauties when the eye is closed in sleep;
We feel it when the nerves are all at rest —
When the heart stops, and the charmed soul throbs on."

Stormy old John Neal, master of all professions and businesses, everything from boxing-master to novelist, — he, too, must fail to take the heights of song. Well, he gave success and defeat a sharp tug over him. His "Birth of a Poet" reads very like a family record: —

"On a blue summer night,
While the stars were asleep,
Like gems of the deep,
In their own drowsy light;
While the newly mown hay
On the green earth lay,
And all that came near it went scented away;
From a lone woody place
There looked out a face

With large blue eyes
Like the wet, warm skies,
Brimful of water and light;
A profusion of hair
Flashing out on the air,
And a forehead alarmingly bright.
'Twas the head of a poet! He grew
As the sweet strange flowers of the wilderness grow,
In the dropping of natural dew,
Unheeded, alone,
Till his heart had blown
As the sweet, strange flowers of the wilderness blow;
Till every thought wore a changeable stain
Like flower-leaves wet with the sunset rain.
A proud and passionate boy was he,
Like all the children of Poesy;
With a haughty look and a haughty tread,
And something awful about his head;
With wonderful eyes
Full of woe and surprise,
Like eyes of them that see the dead.
Looking about,
For a moment or two, he stood
On the shore of the mighty wood;
Then ventured out
With a bounding step and a joyful shout,
The brave sky bending o'er him,
The broad sea all before him!"

A score of names, now hardly known, bear witness to hurried visitations of the muse deserving of something better than forgetfulness; but the case of poor Percival seems most pitiful of all. Blake himself does not better illustrate the poetic temperament: —

"I have of late fallen into an unconquerable habit of dreaming with my eyes wide open. My whole life has been a round of reveries. I have lived in a world of my own imagining; and such has been the vividness of my conceptions, that I can, at any moment when I have an inclination, summon them to my mental presence with the ease of a magician of old, when he evoked with his charmed rod the shades of the departed."

With the poetic temperament, and with learning and spontaneity rarely equalled by successful adventurers up treacherous Helicon, he, with the rest, must be enrolled among the almosts.

"The world is full of poetry — the air
Is living with its spirit; and the waves
Dance to the music of its melodies,
And sparkle in its brightness.
Earth is veiled,
And mantled with its beauty; and the walls
That close the universe with crystal in
Are eloquent with voices that proclaim
The unseen glories of immensity,
In harmonies too perfect and too high
For aught but beings of celestial mould,
And speak to man in one eternal hymn,
Unfading beauty and unyielding power."

The world of poetry is peculiarly Percival's own; but there, too, a miss is as good as a mile, and his name is now rarely heard.

Perhaps a dozen of our early lovers and practisers of verse were more than Bloomfields and

Clares; yet, as these fell away at the approach of robust Thomson, so our home songsters dropped back into the shadow in the presence of the lad that began at once his own and his country's poetic career with "Thanatopsis."

With Bryant, as with Whittier, poetry is not the vocation; if Whittier gave his best years to the liberation of the slave, Bryant gave his — a half-hundred of them — to the general guidance and advancement of his countrymen. Always a moralist, he is at times a poet. Meditation on the great theme of life and death in the calm presence of Nature, — this was Bryant's rest from the toil of a long and busy life.

"Thanatopsis" — though the "Thanatopsis" of 1811 was not the "Thanatopsis" of to-day — announced a new poet, a new poet with the nice balance of brain that insures certainty. Bryant struck surely when midway in the teens. So nicely balanced were his faculties that he had simply to hold the course in which he placed himself at the first step. One characteristic, steadiness of merit, was thus early evidenced, — a characteristic at once strong and weak. For, while with unerring judgment — another word for taste — we are certain of the recognition and constant maintenance of fitness, are certain of the artist, on the other hand, the judgment so austere and inflexible that it will turn neither to

right nor left points to self-containment bordering on the dangerous. Only when the mind, yielding the control, is now and then carried out of itself, are we sure of something better than has been; only then may we predict great progress, and look for the occasional surprises of perfection that astonish, most of all, the unwitting instrument of their production. There is danger in faultlessness. Virtue herself is wont to announce her regal coming by a tattered and shambling herald. It is a happy augury when one in the direct line of the blood of song is caught paying court to the dull or the trivial; erelong he will prove as pliant in the grasp of beauty and power. By the backward swing to the farthest point from inspiration, impetus is gained that, on the return sweep, carries to the peak of achievement. While, then, we have in Bryant a sure artist, we never get from him the unexpected.

It is a current notion that Bryant, rearing his altar in the woods and fields, is the high priest of Nature. Nature is the altar; but the goddess is morals. Bryant is skilful in depicting the place of his solemn ceremony, he is second to none of our poets as a "Nature painter." A painter, however, is not a priest. Painter of Nature, priest of morals, Bryant uses his skill as an artist to frame the features, to enforce the message, of

the lofty goddess, — Duty. Wordsworth, too, was high priest to the

> "Stern daughter of the voice of God";

but, devoted as he was, he could divide the service between her and Nature. With the rigid cast of Bryant division is impossible. Wordsworth, domineering when with his fellow-men, could surrender himself to Nature, content to be her mouthpiece; hence the unevenness, the variety, and the occasional ecstasy, — the incarnation of charm. Hence, too, the hope and the joy, —

> "that blessed mood,
> In which the burden of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood
> In which the affections gently lead us on
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body and become a living soul,
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony and the deep power of joy
> We see into the life of things."

To see into the life of things, — here is the pith of Wordsworth's genius; and here, again, is a power that differentiates these two high priests, among the more austere on the list of song.

While Bryant is, perhaps, our most correct

"Nature painter," the treatment of Nature is external compared with the treatment of his own remote, lofty soul. He stands at the altar, stately and calm, compelling the elements to bend to his one high mood, — the mood of him that would rise to the Author of all things, and stand, unspotted, before him.

Wordsworth received fr[illegible] Nature, Bryant gave to her; Bryant masters, Wordsworth is mastered. Here is the key to Bryant's limitation; and here may we begin to account for his slight production in point of quantity. The rare purity and nobility of spirit being once cast in language noble and pure as the spirit itself, the task was ended. Material so precious is soon exhausted. The riches of Bryant's nature being compact and regularly developed, his unerring judgment deterred him from idle digging on either side of the slender gold-bearing vein.

The poet of "unbought grace" has always youth, enthusiasm, inspiration; these are among the tests. Bryant was born old. The gain was the shortened toil toward perfection; the loss was the youth, the enthusiasm, and the inspiration. Bryant's reliance was not on the poet's rock of strength, inspiration, but on a substitute for it, — as good a one as may be, — meditation. Nor is this all; the meditation, though in a high, broad field, is in that one field and

that only. Even the Nature wherein he sets up his altar is of the one realm, the upper realm of quiet and peace, the region of "supreme repose": —

> "Be it ours to meditate,
> In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
> And to the beautiful order of thy works
> Learn to conform the order of our lives."

So strong is the tendency toward tranquillity that the burden of the song is less the life than the fate of the race. Bryant is the laureate of gentle, restful death. Plainly as this is shown in the "Hymn to Death," it is as plain in "Thanatopsis," "A Forest Hymn," "The Prairies;" in nearly all the poems, long and short; it is the theme of the perfect lyric, embodying the loveliest and most familiar lines of all the thirteen thousand.

Thoroughly aware, as we are in Bryant, of the vegetarian even to the verse, a little shivery with the chillness, ever and anon we would bespeak for the white fane a red coal from the roaring forge of our "Kosmos"; we would be only too glad of a live word, as out of the whirlwind, sounded by the other revolter, the great English rebel, able to lead more fractious legions than shall ever rise, head and host in himself, — sounded by him who with one bold love-push comes at the very heart: —

"Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! how he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet."

Indeed, we do not strike so high; we would relish a throb from the pulse of one of our almosts: —

"The Spring is here, — the delicate-footed May
With its slight fingers full of leaves and flowers;
And with it comes a thirst to be away,
Wasting in wood-paths its voluptuous hours, —
A feeling that is like a sense of wings,
Restless to soar above these perishing things."

A little color, a little warmth, a little of the something that comes close, — we fairly hunger for it. This is but another way of saying that Bryant, strong in simplicity and sensuousness, is weak in passion, — a point made before, when was noted the absence of youth and enthusiasm.

The coldness of Bryant — though he is never down to the degree marked by the French critic that would have his verses bound in fur — is of far-reaching influence. The all-conquering order of imagination has its bed and procreant cradle in warmth, passion. Imagination is not a fixed thing; there are degrees, there are kinds, of it as well as of the reasoning power and of emotion.

The kind of imagination characteristic of Bryant is to be found in such lines as these : —

> "Or haply the vast hall
> Of fairy palace, that outlasts the night,
> And fades not in the glory of the sun ; —
> Where crystal columns send forth slender shafts
> And crossing arches ; and fantastic aisles
> Wind from the sight in brightness, and are lost
> Among the crowded pillars."

For a passage of exceptional vigor and movement, we may quote from the "Hymn to Death," —

> "And when the reveller,
> Mad in the chase of pleasure, stretches on,
> And strains each nerve, and clears the path of life
> Like wind, thou point'st him to the dreadful goal,
> And shak'st thy hour-glass in his reeling eye,
> And check'st him in mid-course."

Among the lines cited by Stedman as illustrative of Bryant's imagination are the following, from "Thanatopsis" : —

> "And, poured round all,
> Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste."

> "Take the wings
> Of morning, traverse Barca's desert sands
> Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
> Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
> Save his own dashings — yet the dead are there."

True imagination ; but put it beside the imagination all aglow with emotion, —

"And have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man —
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

Here we have two kinds, certainly two degrees, of imagination; and there is as great a distance between them as there is between the lyrics, "The Yellow Violet" and "The Solitary Reaper." Stedman quotes also from "A Rain-Dream," —

"'T is the Wind of night;
A lonely wanderer between earth and cloud,
In the black shadow and the chilly mist,
Along the streaming mountain-side, and through
The dripping woods, and o'er the plashy fields,
Roaming and sorrowing still, like one who makes
The journey of life alone, and nowhere meets
A welcome or a friend, and still goes on
In darkness."

Set this against ten words from the great "Laker," —

"a mind forever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone."

Take "The Prairies," which Stoddard says is worth going to the end of the world to write: —

"Lo! they stretch
In airy undulations, far away,
As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,
Stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed,
And motionless forever."

This is excellent; but mate it with the imagination of the scornful Georgian, a few traces of whom Swinburne has kindly permitted to remain: —

"The eternal surge
Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves
Of empires heave but like some passing waves."

Will the two imaginings mate? No more than will these: —

"I lie and listen to her mighty voice:
A voice of many tones, sent up from many streams
That wander through the gloom, from woods unseen
Swayed by the sweeping of the tides of air,
From rocky chasms where darkness dwells all day,
And hollows of the great invisible hills,
And sands that edge the ocean, stretching far
Into the night — a melancholy sound!"

"The gentleness of heaven is on the sea.
Listen! the mighty being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder everlastingly."

But we have gone far enough, perhaps, to exhibit the kind, or grade, of Bryant's imagination.

Stress has been laid on the limitations and

deficiencies of America's first poet, — first in time, and one of the first in excellence. In his case, as in that of the other poets reviewed, the purpose has been to listen to the voice, forgetting as far as possible who it is that sings; for poetry, not the poet, must be first in the thought if the estimate is to be just and instructive. With the characteristics of great poetry in mind, Bryant reveals — to sum up — a lofty soul, a strong, broad mind of exquisite poise, a sure eye for natural things, and the cunning of art to give these possessions perfect expression.

It would be gratifying indeed were the perfectness of Bryant's expression generally appreciated; but poetry is little read, and there can be small hope of widespread appreciation of it till the heart of the poet's work is plucked out and held, dripping, before the eyes of the world. To do this looks something like murder, but no gentler proceeding will catch and rivet the roving eyes of the multitude. To edit a poet savors of the criminal, but it so savors mainly to our reverence and affection, qualities as misleading as they are admirable. In strict truth there could be neither a wiser nor a tenderer tribute paid the hallowed memory of our poets than to pluck out the heart of their work, and hold it up to universal gaze; and the service so rendered to the people would transcend many a loud sug-

gestion for reform and improvement. In the face of the many compilations now extant, a volume of fifty poems could be selected from the works of Bryant, Emerson, Holmes, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell, that would not only surprise the English-speaking world with the worth of American verse, but would prove a potent stroke for culture. Bryant, for example, wrote one hundred and sixty poems; while it is on a dozen of these that his fame rests. The dozen include the others; they are really all, they are Bryant. As with him, so it is with the rest of our poets, with all poets of all times and lands, the masters excepted, whose number can be reckoned by the count of one's fingers. To read the poets is impossible, to read the heart of them is possible; and it would mean much for moral elevation, for spiritual growth, for the love of pure beauty, were it part of our schooling to be thoroughly familiar with the following poems, and with a like small number of others that represent a half-dozen of our poets severally as these do the "Father of American Song": "Thanatopsis," "To a Water Fowl," "A Winter Piece," "A Forest Hymn," "June," "The Death of the Flowers," "The Evening Wind," "The Prairies."

Attention being called to Bryant's fifty years' service in practical affairs, to his original use of

the noble metre that was the natural outlet of his soul, and the medium through which he rewaked the strains of the old father of the fathers of song, it remains to observe that, if the trend of song has been steadily away from the model on which he built, fashion is, of all things, the most ephemeral, and, let change and divergence work as they may, the voices of our choir will ever blend in proud recognition of their venerable head.

VII.

WALT WHITMAN.

IT takes one wild poet to hit off another, and we may begin with Whitman by applying to him Joaquin's words anent Walker, the warrior, — "He was a brick!" "Brick" and "bard" are hardly synonymous terms, but what matter? There are other needed folk besides poets, and it may be that, forty years ago, we were in just the predicament to cry, "My kingdom for a 'brick'!" Such, assuredly, was Whitman's notion; and with slouch hat, and hand on hip, he stepped in.

"Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it."

Bravo, Walt! We surmised that the bookworm, the dude, the prude, the whole finikin family, would catch it; and they have.

Whitman is well worth heeding, if for no other reason than for his insistence on the forgotten fact that we are not born with our clothes on, and that nature no more than he himself has a predilection for "neuters and geldings." If his language, in dealing with these truths, waxes so emphatic as to wipe clean out the last trace of moderation, to strip off the last layer of delicacy, let us remember that the "brick" does nothing by halves, and keep up our end. No nibbling at "Leaves of Grass;" we must fall to ox-fashion, whipping up whole mouthfuls. We must take things as they come, — "koboos," "hind shoulders," "mystic deliria," "allons," "space and time," "tough pimples" of alligators, "Ma femme," "libertad," "life and death," "Kneph," "teff-wheat," "fierce-throated beauties" of locomotives, "trottoirs," "tympan of the ears," — all the infinity of sprigs in the "bouquets of incomparable feuillage." It is tough fodder; but we can grind with a will, since 't is death to the neuter and the gelding. We shall get rid of "sich," at least, and those of us that survive will have the satisfaction henceforth of being able to stand up to the rack with good bovine appetite, able to take whatever Pan or Pandemonium may provide.

There are two sides to the question of civilization, as to all questions, and it is only fair that

the wild side should now and then have its innings. Enough, therefore, if we find two lines in "So Long" made good throughout the volume, —

> "Camerado, this is no book;
> Who touches this touches a man."

Though this is not the whole truth about "Leaves of Grass," certain it is that we find, first of all, a robust, unabashed, magnetic fellow-creature, — a being that no man of pulse and stomach can afford to pass by. He "of Manhattan the son," is a figure, a live figure, if not in literature, out of it — somewhere, illustrating the proposition that it is a magnificent thing to be a first-class "human critter." "Well, *he* looks like a man," said Lincoln; and so say we, all of us, as we plunge along behind him through the lusty Grass-leaves.

The finikin family find it a fact in their favor that the highest encomium on our "Kosmos" has come from the superintendent of a lunatic asylum. The finikinese are precipitous, they begin at the wrong end; they are thinking rather of the bard than of the "brick"; and they are not quite the witnesses for a "brick," anyhow. Let art and chaos have it out, while we hold to the fact that a big "brick" of a "human critter" is altogether too substantial a thing to be whisked out of sight by a smart saying. Mind your reck-

oning, "dulce affetuosos," and see that you try not to be in two places at once. We bide not just now

"Where Orpheus and where Homer are";

we are simply with Walt, on the morning side of Manhattan or "yahonking" with the wild ganders, heaven knows exactly where. Away with your Dante and Shakespeare and Milton; stick we to Whitman, while he "lets down the bars to a good lesson" in health, strength, out-and-outness, trust and happiness, in many a good old solid doctrine. While we shall be overjoyed to receive a new Solomon or a new Shakespeare as soon as he can possibly come, make we the most of what we have; and it is doubtful if we have anything better for the nonce than this strapping, yawping boy, pet of the good old Mother.

"To behold the day-break!
The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,
The air tastes good to my palate."

. . . . .

"Smile, O voluptuous cool-breathed earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset — earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous power of the full moon, just tinged with blue!"

These lines are more than dithyrambics; they are the credentials of a square-backed, thunder-

ing son of the ground, stamped with the sign manual of the Mother.

Neither is the stickler for poetry to be wholly disappointed. If the hand is that of the Sons of Anak, the heart is that of the poet. Whitman is keen on the poet's trail; he knows where the fat pastures are. The raw material of song — he is always up to the chin in that; and the raw material of song is not apt to glut the market. Nor are faith and joy any too plenty. If we find these essential and permanent things, is it not enough? Really, it should be, and we ought to be glad of a chance to hearten up, and hurry after our Paumanokian "camerado," washing our palate with the clean air as we go, halting now and then to let the bay mare and what not shame the silliness out of us. In sober truth we are a sophisticated lot, and none too tight in the knees; in very truth we need the "flaunt of the sunshine" and some "brick" of a "human critter" to "blow grit" in us. For this purpose Whitman,

"Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,"

has his place. It is not the niche of him that chiselled the Venus de Milo, or of him that bequeathed us the griefs of Antigone; but it is a niche, and one not the easiest to fill.

The "bravuras of birds" and the "bustle of

growing wheat" — these are no mean things, of themselves; and when we add to a renewal of our acquaintance with these and their associates a freshened interest in the natural man, and, withal, "good heart as a radical possession and habit," we establish a mission few are either prepared or inclined to undertake. Whitman does undertake it, and fulfils it after a fashion. He is the physician for certain disorders — if one can take his doses. It is answered that the "if" upsets all; that only the iron-nerved and ostrich-mawed can swallow his heroic potions, and that for these physic is superfluous. Granted; nevertheless the halest are not without their ailings, and Whitman may have a busy practice, though confined to the weak spots in those that forget that, after all, Achilles had a heel.

The chapter in "November Boughs" entitled "A Backward Glance o'er Travelled Roads" reveals Whitman as a middle-aged man, possessed of a "feeling or ambition" worthy, indeed, of a hero; namely, —

"To articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form and uncompromisingly my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic personality in the midst of and tallying the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days and of current America, and to exploit that personality, identified

with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book."

Again he says, —

"From another point of view 'Leaves of Grass' is avowedly the song of sex and amativeness, and even animality — though meanings that do not usually go along with those words are behind all, and will duly emerge — and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere.

. . . . . .

"I say the profoundest service that poems or any other writings can do for their reader is not merely to satisfy the intellect or supply something polished and interesting, nor even to depict great passions or persons or events, but to fill him with vigorous and clean manliness, religiousness, and give him good heart as a radical possession and habit."

Obviously enough, when our mariner of Mannahatta set out, mighty waters were launched upon; and if they were not conquered from shore to shore, we have only to record once more the limitation of human effort, the balking of laudable ambition, and to be thankful for the success so far as it goes. Any personality is no small theme, and Whitman's was no small personality. To tally the "momentous spirit and facts" of American life for twoscore years — this alone is an undertaking likely to keep one active.

But the articulation is to be something more; it is to be poetry, — art. The extent to which, in the writer's judgment, this Titan's task was performed has been indicated. Others go further, averring that, beyond his personality and nature and the natural man, our author embodies, as he essays to, "current America" and "democracy" in general, together with many another bit of extensiveness; all this "in poetic form." As for America and democracy, is not the "tough" somewhat too triumphant; are not the "vivas" a little too loud for the "fancy man and rowdy"; are not the "snag-toothed hostler" and the scavenger somewhat too emphatic? Undoubtedly, the expanse of territory, the prosperity of material interests and the free-and-easy government of our new republic have fostered extremes, both in sentiment and diction; still it is possible that Whitman's writings are so far from voicing "current America" as not to sound clearly even the note of modern times. To-day, "Americanos," with other civilized folk the world over, live in a time which, for instance, sinks the individual. Imagine our "imperturbe," for whom space is a bandbox, and the past nations of the earth mere preludes to his prodigious appearance, — imagine him of all men in the rôle of spokesman for such a period! The heart of Whitman's strength lies largely in his resist-

ance to his time, in his onslaught of the semi-savage upon the "civilizee." In both spirit and method he belongs back in the simpler, stronger, gladder days. Much at home as he makes himself in the thundering bustle, amid the astonishing conquests peculiar to the period, after all, the secret of his power is to be traced to his kinship with the able-bodied, unsophisticated, believing, joyous early man. This early man, tricked out in modern fashion, he has "exploited"; he has said good things about Nature; but "current America" and "democracy," it were safer to say, still await articulation.

Whitman's articulation, whatever it be, is in his own way. Is Whitman's way the poet's way? Certain critics, certain poets, so affirm. Here some of us must call a halt, and, if such be the poetic form of democracy, cry, Feudalism forever! The shining target for the Finikin family, the superintendent of lunatics, before mentioned, says, —

"I am myself fully satisfied that Walt Whitman is one of the greatest men, if not the very greatest man, that the world has so far produced."

Mr. W. M. Rossetti adds, —

"I sincerely believe him to be of the order of great poets. . . . His voice will one day be potential or magisterial wherever the English language is spoken."

There is nothing faint-hearted about these announcements; the honors for courage resting easy between them. While the point raised by Mr. Rossetti is, in one sense, secondary, in another it is of prime importance, affecting, as it does, not only Whitman, but the art of poetry at large. It is strange enough that, while the great laws of Nature, once formulated, are settled forever, equally sovereign laws of art must be set up over and over, lest the multitude, ay, the critics and poets, be led astray. Whitman did not revolt against art, says one that should know, since he was not born in some such regulative realm and reign as fell to the lot of Queen Anne; being born in America in the nineteenth century, he is "remote from authority." On these terms ours is a free land, indeed. Not all America can rise to this height of democracy. Some among us find that at the North Pole or at the South Pole, or at any station between, two presences have authority over the poet. Calendars and geographies do not affect these; they are indifferent alike to Queen Annes and President Harrisons. Certain critics forget this in their treatment of Browning, forget it again in the case of Browning's brother revolter. Poetic truth and poetic beauty — these are present forever, and absolute in authority; and to these Whitman does not submit, against these he does revolt.

"Of the order of great poets"! What is Mr. Rossetti saying? All the great poets together do not number more than a dozen, and Walt is to make the dozen a baker's. In the great poet we have high imagination, great thought, great constructive power, perfect form, supernal music and beauty. If we are not sure that these are to be found in Tennyson, we shall do well to think many times before swearing that one cannot fail to find them in the thirteenth member of the sovereign circle, in him hailing from "fish-shape Paumanok." Had Mr. Rossetti exclaimed, "Jabber of Caliban, belch of chaos!" he would have done Whitman no more injustice than he has done the art of poetry in the expression, "of the order of great poets." With "Leaves of Grass" in one hand and the elementary principles of any poetry, great or small, in the other, possibly the critic will find the division "Songs of Myself," what the author styles it, — "yawp"; the division "Children of Adam," eroticism cropped of its first, third, and fourth syllables; the rest of the volume, in the main, a series of instantaneous photographs, paralleled only by the cavorting of Muybridge's horses.

Few "Americanos" claim for their country, as yet, a great poet; the most of us think, however, that "these States" can make a showing of several genuine poets. Whitman may have been a

greater man than any of our poets; he may have done a more useful work than theirs, — these are other questions, not to be considered here, — but the work was done in his own way, not in their way, not in the poet's way. Indeed, on the point of art, we are compelled to find in "Leaves of Grass," instead of the inauguration of a new literature, a revival of the raw period before literature was, — the progress of

> "the irregular crab
> Which, though 't go backward, thinks that it goes right,
> Because it goes its own way."

Walt went at his work in his own way, with his trousers in his boots and his shirt-sleeves rolled up; the way, after all, proved commendably effective. Here we should stop; not go on to say that, because he can with one Sullivanic punch floor a dozen mincing "eleves," because he calls without ceasing on all with any blood in their veins to stand up, to enjoy themselves, to "loaf," and again to "whack away," — because he does this and much more of the sort, that he "articulates" *anything* in "poetic form." We should not be done up in the "eleves," nor should we be afraid of a brush with the world, of a frisk with the flesh and the devil; but we should insist upon it that in song "yawp" can never be "potential or magisterial"; that we step beyond the boundary line of

art the moment we begin to "loaf" or to "whack away." Whitman was a king in the realm of physique, an emperor in the realm of comradeship, — in short, a giant of his shaggy, hearty kind; all this, however, and much more with it does not necessitate a poet. The man, the child of Nature, the patriot, the author of "Leaves of Grass," red as the blood ran in his veins, "lot" of him that there was, "and all so luscious," was not animated by the ichor that inspires the imperial line of the sons of song. Whitman simply held to the apron-strings of the wise old Mother when, at the outset, he strode away from the circle of all poets, great and small.

Since Whitman commands admiration for what he really was, it is quite unnecessary to wrench elementary laws in order to set him up for what he was not. Much of the commendation of Emerson, Symonds, Thoreau, and even of Burroughs, is merited; but that any man of culture can find Walt a great poet, is disheartening enough to the hopes of art. The sober truth would seem to be that one piece, "My Captain," which is at the farthest remove from the bulk of his writings, and the nearest to acknowledged models, is the only composition in "Leaves of Grass" that may be indisputably termed a poem.

The pieces "Out of the Cradle, etc.," and

"Lincoln's Burial Hymn," are ranked among the more convincing witnesses to Whitman's poetic gifts. One critic, whose word goes a long way, finds the "Burial Hymn" "exquisitely idyllic"; he finds it in the "melodious manner," and gives it a place — it cannot be said how near — on the line with Lowell's "Commemoration Ode." Let us read the opening divisions, —

1.

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

"Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2.

"O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night — O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd — O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless — O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul!

3.

"In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle — and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break."

A part is not the whole; but if there are few signs of more than the raw material in the first seventeen lines, there can be neither the exquisiteness nor the melody the poets have taught us to look for in the composition entire. Let us read the first six lines once more, —

"The last time the lilacs blossomed in my dooryard, it was a season of mourning. One night, gazing on the early star as it went down in the West, I stood, thinking of a friend lately passed away; and now again the three are with me, — the lilacs, the star, and the grief. They are with me now, and they will always be with me at this season of the year, coming together in the spring-time."

Tried by any test or standard, from Musæus down to Sir Lewis Morris, what is there of poetry in the magisterial dithyrambs not in the prose version? What beauty, what music, what atmosphere, what captivating cadence, is present to give the grass-leaves the advantage? Nor can more be discovered to differentiate the second division, as art, from the diarial apostrophes to be found in profusion at any of our seminaries for young ladies. In the third division there are instances of a good eye and fine sympathy for natural

things, — the "heart-shaped leaves of rich green" and the "pointed blossom rising delicate"; but occasional words and phrases, though of the choicest, do not insure an exquisite and melodious idyl. We have not simply to say over the names of the stars, of the trees and flowers, to win the laurels of a Theocritus or a Tennyson. If Nature is to be the poet, she can do her own writing. If man is to be the poet, he must do his own writing; and the writing must be more knightly than the pricking of a sway-backed prose hack over a poetic road.

"There is no man in the marsh-land, in whose deep pools could be found death, whose thick grasses could moor a boat forever. It is a lonely place, and only my thought is there, striving to possess it all with wide vision.

"Over the marsh-land stray odors from border flowers, but there is no sense to harbor them. Over the marsh-land the sound-waves float, but there is no tongue to awaken them to speech and no ear to receive them. In the marsh-land is God, without the souls in which alone He shines unto His own vision; in the marsh-land is God, a light without His own darkness.

"The marsh-land is a lonely place; there is no man there. Only my thought is there, holding what it can encompass of God."

The quotation is from a story-writer, — an Americana, too; but, really, if the "Burial Hymn"

is poetry, Miss Wilkins should lose no time in getting together her "pastels in prose," and announce a new volume of song.

All biases aside, nothing in our minds but the wish to discover the link coupling the "Burial Hymn" with any exquisite or melodious poem, — with this in mind, and only this, we are in a world, not void, but without form; and without form there is no poetry. The sack of raw material is simply slit and allowed to leak; the process is a mere spilling, gravitation being the only law of order at work. The eye runs down a list of exquisitely idyllic things, but the setting! The occasional felicities of word and phrase only emphasize the fact that they are aliens, strangers in a strange land. It is unnecessary to go through this composition line by line; but, for example, if the line,

"Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,"

is song, idyllic or other, we have but to twist every-day speech, to spoil our common talk, and Olympus is won.

Another critic finds Whitman the "clear forerunner of the great American poet." While this is less startling than Mr. Rossetti's dictum, a glance will show how far, in point of poetic form, we are behind a wild bard of days bygone, —

"As roll a thousand waves to the rock,
So Swaran's host came on;
As meets a rock a thousand waves,
So Inisfail met Swaran."

Or again, —

"My love is a son of the hill;
He pursues the flying deer.
His gray dogs are panting round him,
His bowstring sounds in the wind.
Dost thou rest by the fount of the rock,
Or by the noise of the mountain-stream?
The rushes are nodding to the wind,
The mist flies over the hill."

Vivas for Vinvela! We hope to match her music some day. We hope to catch up with her and Agandecca leaving the "hall of her secret sigh," "loveliness around her as a light," and "her steps like the music of songs." We take courage; but the way is long from our current American

"Girls, mothers, housekeepers, in all their performances."

Of the critics quoted, three live on the thither shore of the Atlantic. The immediate inheritors of the greatest literature the world has known, continue to fly in the face of the genius that gave it them whenever the matter considered is an American product. The critics brought up on Shakespeare and Milton find the nearest American approach to these in writers at the very farthest remove from them, yes, distressingly distant

from the humblest of their successors? Perhaps the English findings in the case of our literature are all based on the "remote-from-authority" theory. Whatever the explanation be, the fact remains that when we see one of our rimers swinging it round the British Isle, we make short work of the mystery by surmising that things were not quite comfortable at home. Does some enthusiast among us issue a volume entitled "Gems from Walt Whitman," we smile over the sparkle of the first gem, —

> "See, projected through time,
> For me an audience interminable,"

and, withdrawing in a body, leave the author in the undisturbed enjoyment of the jewels. But whither shall we flee, where hide our confusion, when the British critic in high place, the critic nurtured in the air and light of the winged Elizabethans, says to us that he finds in Whitman's sayings on life and death the accent of great poetry, of such lines as these, —

> "I swear, 't is better to be lowly born,
> And range with humble livers in content,
> Than to be perk'd up in a glistering grief
> And wear a golden sorrow";

> "For within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps death his court";

"'T is of all sleeps the sweetest;
Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,
And kings from height of all their painted glories
Fall, like spent exhalations, to this centre";

"Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain"?

But England begins to redeem herself; Mr. Watts, in the course of his article, "Walt Whitman," in the *Athenæum* (April 2, 1892) says: "Poetic genius no one now dreams of crediting him with."

It is time for a word of accord. It is generally recognized that Whitman is exceptionally happy in his headings. Happy indeed he is; so happy, in fact, that the table of contents of "Leaves of Grass" would not be out of place in the body of the volume.

"To the garden the world, from pent-up aching rivers
I sing the body electric.
A woman waits for me, spontaneous me;
One hour to madness and joy —
. . . . . .
O hymen! O hymenee!"

Surely this initiatory bit of the contents-table of "Children of Adam" might with propriety find a place in the body of the division, there to suffer neither in point of rhythm nor of consecutiveness of thought.

But, seriously, we gnaw the horn searching for poetry in "Leaves of Grass"; we gnaw the horn, and we wrong Walt. Let us turn from Walt "of the order of great poets" to Walt the Wild, the chanter of "Calamus." What is it, Walt, that you say about death?

"They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

"Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it."

"Through me shall the words be said to make death exhilarating,
Give me your tone therefore, O Death, that I may accord with it,
Give me yourself, for I see that you belong to me now above all, and are folded inseparably together, you love and death are,
Nor will I allow you to balk me any more with what I was calling life,
For now it is convey'd to me that you are the purports essential,
That you hide in these shifting forms of life, for reasons, and that they are mainly for you,
That you beyond them come forth to remain, the real reality,

That behind the mask of materials you patiently wait,
no matter how long,
That you will one day perhaps take control of all,
That you will perhaps dissipate this entire show of appearance,
That may-be you are what it is all for, but it does not last so very long,
But you will last very long."

Shall we recant? We have heard all this before, and couched in terms more winning. Once more we say the same of the articulations on "democracy" and "current America," and passing on, with a glance here and there, stop at such places as these, —

"I will effuse egotism and show it underlying all, and I will be the bard of personality,
And I will show of male and female that either is but the equal of the other,
And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me, for I am determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice to prove you illustrious."

"What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
Me going in for my chances."

Herein do we see the real Whitman; herein do we find him at home, and offering first-hand matter, as is his wont when the natural man and Nature are the theme, and as is not his wont when democracy, or war, or death, or manual labor is in the ascendant. We find no poems, nothing nearer it than the suggestion of themes, as in the line

"The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill,"

or in the marching title,

"As I walk these broad, majestic days."

"Expecting the main things from you," Whitman says to us naïvely. Nothing could be apter; if we are to have poems, we must furnish them ourselves. We find never "the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language," but "roots and leaves themselves alone." We find not the "autobiography of a soul"; we find the word soul, but the thing flesh, perpetually, even to the "sweet-fleshed day." Walt Whitman had a soul; but, come what might, it would weigh some two hundred pounds, and wear a low-cut collar. In short, we find in this last hard look, not a poet, but a "brick" of a "human critter," with whom we will "go gallivant," —

"I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)

. . . . . .

"Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding,

No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or
apart from them,
No more modest than immodest."

Ay, we will "go gallivant." Have but a dozen superior souls found a fraction of the good reported, every one of us must find something. Whitman says it will be grit, and he should know; "clean grit and human natur," blasts of them driven even to the marrow. The poets crowned, wound from top to toe, there is plenty of laurel left in the woods. Nature sees to it that her own brows are not stripped naked, and she keeps a sprig, too, for her yawping boy. It is idle to argue with the fond old Mother. "I know," she answers; "but he is my boy!" Yes, we will take the Mother's word for it. "Old topknot" calls, your "head slues round on your neck"; here 's for you, Walt, we will "go gallivant"!

"Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess
the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there
are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand,
nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on
the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take
things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your-
self."
. . . . . .
"The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple
boughs wag."

"The hairy wild bee that murmurs and hankers up and down."

. . . . . .

"The wet of woods through the early hours."

"But I am that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,
Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land,
Which the birds know in the woods mornings and evenings."

. . . . . .

"The great laws take and effuse without argument,
I am of the same style, for I am their friend,
I love them quits and quits, I do not halt and make salaams."

"I lie abstracted and hear beautiful tales of things and the reasons of things,
They are so beautiful I nudge myself to listen."

"The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good."

"It seems to me that everything in the light and air ought to be happy,
Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave, let him know he has enough."

VIII.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

"With a thousand angels upon the wind" —

HERE, and so accompanied, rode Blake the mystic, from childhood to the end of his threescore and ten. The poem entitled "Verses," from which this line is taken, opens with couplets that fitly introduce the singer so strange in equipment and method, standing well toward the front among the defiant forces, the insoluble phenomena, —

"With happiness stretched across the hills
In a cloud that dewy sweetness distils,
With a blue sky spread over with wings,
And a mild sun that mounts and sings;
With trees and fields full of fairy elves,
And little devils who fight for themselves,
Remembering the verses that Hayley sung
When my heart knocked against the root of my tongue,
With angels planted in hawthorn bowers,
And God himself in the passing hours;
With silver angels across my way,
And golden demons that none can stay."

We are swung at once into midair, and the natural exclamation is, Madman! Blake, in his lifetime, was known to many as a madman, but let us not be too hasty in consigning great gifts to the asylum; for Coleridge, De Quincey, Byron, and even Wordsworth, have been tracked beyond the bounds of sanity. The spice of madness demanded for the poet, Blake assuredly had; and this is all that concerns us at present.

The many make too little of such a mind, while a few make too much of it. Mr. Gilchrist and Swinburne are guilty on the side of over-appreciation. If, here and there, are applied to Blake adulatory adjectives larger than his erratic genius can well carry, he is very different from what he has been found to be by his detractors. The sympathetic reader finds a deal of queerness, a medley of Ezekiel, Ossian, and an innominable *tertium quid;* finds independence, intolerance, wildness; finds incoherence, vast scattering, rhapsody thinning away into nebula, mysticism slipping into nonsense, — in short, defiance of much that is right in thought and in method; finds this, but, mingled with it, strains and whole poems possible only to the poet pure and simple, to the singer by the grace of God. Indeed, Blake, at his best, is, what we should always joy to discover, an excellent illustration of the old notion, the true notion, of the poet; with imagi-

nation, vision, faith, enthusiasm, he has the poet's kind of thought, his straight sight, and his swift method, his fire and his music shining and singing along the native, inevitable lines. As we read the place of his birth, there is something prophetic in the names, "Broad Street, Golden Square"; of a truth, he was the babe for a spacious, radiant cradle.

It is a waste of time to look for system in the work of such a mind; as in the case of Emerson, the light is too white for more than gleams, flashes. Blake is a reporter, a flesh-and-blood conduit for the high might that descends, through certain rare organisms, to become the precious possession of men. We get from him occasional meteor streaks of prophecy; we get scattered blossoms of philosophy; we hear the voice of the teacher, indirect, trembling with passion; we listen to the joyous songs of nature and of "humble livers" from the lips of one the color of whose singing-robe matches the sunset purple of Wordsworth's; we hear the last echo of the days when youth and music ruled the English world; and, having this, we have something harder to find than theories and systems.

The vision is mightier in this poet than the faculty divine. He sees so much that he forgets the blindness of the world; with so much of the poet in himself, he forgets how little of the poet there is in us; he draws the rapid outlines, dashes

off the sketch, and our own imagination is left to complete the picture. It should not be forgotten, however, that in many cases the poems are but half the artistic whole; that it was Blake's habit to engrave his poems, illustrating them with colored drawings round the page or on a separate page. To read the poems apart from the designs is like listening to Wagner's operas, blindfold. To be sure, the poems must stand or fall by themselves; still it is only right to bear in mind that without the illustrations we do not realize the full action of the author's imagination.

Emerson describes himself as a "transparent eyeball," yet his vision is normal; Blake's vision is abnormal. If Emerson sees more than he can tell, Blake is determined that language shall fellow his limitless vision: —

"I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is hindrance and not action. 'What!' it will be questioned, 'when the sun rises, do you not see a disc of fire, somewhat like a guinea?' 'Oh no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!' I question not my corporeal eye, any more than I would question a window, concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it."

The more we inquire into the matter of art, the more evident it becomes that patience is of the very essence of success in it; but, unluckily, all the patience of the little Blake family was in the

heart of faithful, black-eyed Catherine. Had it been among the temperamental treasures of the master of the house, what might he not have done, he that in green boyhood can remind us of the old masters of the drama?—

"And may our duty, Chandos, be our pleasure.—
Now we are alone, Sir John, I will unburden
And breathe my hopes into the burning air,
Where thousand Deaths are posting up and down,
Commissioned to this fatal field of Cressy.
Methinks I see them arm my gallant soldiers,
And gird the sword upon each thigh, and fit
Each shining helm, and string each stubborn bow,
And dance to the neighing of our steeds.
Methinks the shout begins, the battle burns;
Methinks I see them perch on English crests,
And roar the wild flame of fierce war upon
The throngèd enemy! In truth, I am too full;
It is my sin to love the noise of war.

. . . . . .

Considerate age, my lord, views motives,
And not acts, when neither warbling voice
Nor trilling pipe is heard, nor pleasure sits
With trembling age, the voice of Conscience then,
Sweeter than music in a summer's eve,
Shall warble round the snowy head, and keep
Sweet symphony to feathered angels, sitting
As guardians round your chair; then shall the pulse
Beat slow, and taste and touch and sight and sound
and smell,
That sing and dance round Reason's fine-wrought
throne,
Shall flee away, and leave him all forlorn;
Yet not forlorn if Conscience is his friend."

Further along, we come upon the splendid expression, —

"Threatening as the red brow of storms."

(In passing, the adjective "red" illustrates the inexplicable poetic force of certain words. We find it again in Beddoes's

"The red outline of beginning Adam.")

Blake had not the shaping power of imagination for protracted composition, neither was he specially fitted for the favorite effort to unite taste with condensation. The longer pieces are loose, shapeless; and worse than failures are such hyperbolic announcements as, —

"A game-cock clipped and armed for fight
Doth the rising sun affright";

"Every tear from every eye
Becomes a babe in eternity."

Blake poised on a thin ridge, — on the one side chaos, on the other the depth of the ridiculous; and he made missteps both right and left. True; but the recovery! Not only does he balance on the height once more, in the rest of the blessed cloud, but rises on the songbird's wing, and circles and carols at blissful ease in the empyrean.

There is no denying that Blake is prone to go "beating in the void." We must expect it of one that can write, even to a friend, after the following fashion: —

"I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and these works are the delight and study of archangels. Why then should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our Father will do for us and with us according to His divine will, for our good. You, O dear Flaxman, are a sublime archangel, — my friend and companion from eternity. In the divine bosom is our dwelling-place. I look back into the regions of reminiscence, and behold our ancient days before this earth appeared in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated eyes. I see our houses of eternity, which can never be separated, though our mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other."

The visionary that can so write has no difficulty in summoning the builder of the pyramids from the shades to sit for his portrait; and the completion of the work is appropriately celebrated by repairing to the garden arbor, there to while away a summer hour with Catherine, neither of the two further from nakedness than were the first man and woman of sacred legend ere yet the fig-leaf wear came into fashion.

But it is not always in the void; the author of the "Book of Thel" is at home on the ground, as much at ease there as are the "Chimney-Sweeper" and the "Little Black Boy," yes, as are the humblest animal and plant.

"Names alter, things never alter."

"To be good only is to be
A God, or else a pharisee."

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet."

"He who has suffered you to impose on him knows you."

If on the one side is madness, on the other is good old-fashioned sanity; in fact, it is not difficult for Blake to be as worldly-wise as one could wish. Despite his abnormal vision and incoherent utterance, despite his inequality and his thousand vagaries, Blake was a close critic of life. While his vision was abnormally active, the range is round a few elementary principles. It is the safe circuit of Epictetus himself; the favorite themes, love, youth, and childhood, indicating not only sanity, but special qualification for the office of poet. Sweet-tempered and joyous, barring the few lapses unavoidable by one with so ardent a temperament, he saw tne world as the old prophets saw it, beautiful, good; he trusted it, looked up from it to the Maker of all, and sang as he journeyed, angels overhead and lambs at his feet. No man has lived a more thoroughly poetic life; few men have come closer to a realization of his own happy phrase, a "shining lot."

For an instance of the peculiar manner of this

reporter of life, we may take a stanza of the poem "Night," where the ever-present angels are exercising their gentle office, —

> "They look in every thoughtless nest
> Where birds are covered warm;
> They visit caves of every beast,
> To keep them all from harm:
> If they see any weeping
> That should have been sleeping,
> They pour sleep on their head,
> And sit down by their bed."

This is unlike anything we have heard before. Again, he says of Christ, he

> "O'erturned the tent of secret sins,
> And its golden cords and pins."

And in that intense poem, "Broken Love," we have the stanza, —

> "A deep winter dark and cold
> Within my heart thou dost unfold;
> Iron tears and groans of lead
> Thou bind'st around my aching head."

The voice sometimes rises to a shriek, —

> "The God of war is drunk with blood,
> The earth doth faint and fail;
> The stench of blood makes sick the heavens,
> Ghosts glut the throat of hell!"

But the secret of genius soon confronts us again, hiding in such lines as those where Dalila lies at the feet of Samson, —

> "He seemed a mountain, his brow among the clouds;
> She seemed a silver stream, his feet embracing."

This is more striking than Tennyson's picture of Vivien at the feet of Merlin, drawn with four times as many lines save one, —

> "There lay she all her length and kiss'd his feet,
> As if in deepest reverence and love.
> A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe
> Of samite without price, that more exprest
> Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
> In color like the satin-shining palm
> On sallows in the windy gleams of March."

Little importance attaches to the environment as a means of accounting for Blake's poetry. Swinburne makes too much of it, as he does of the oracles of the poet's later period. Blake was kin to the Elizabethans, and were he writing to-day he would probably take his inspiration from them as surely as he did in the third quarter of the last century. True, Shakespeare and the whole nest of singing birds were being closely studied when he began writing, but he was just the man to find them out at any time.

If the Elizabethans were Blake's inspiration, they were by no means Blake. Fuseli's familiar admission concerning his pictures is of special significance in this connection: "Blake is a damned good fellow to steal from." In other words, he was a painter full of original ideas.

The same may be said of him as a poet. We discover in Blake touches, perhaps the first, that we know as Coleridgean; for instance, the last stanza of "The Little Boy Lost," —

> "The night was dark, no father was there,
> The child was wet with dew;
> The mire was deep, and the child did weep,
> And away the vapor flew."

Blake, turn whither he may for inspiration, is an original genius; his method of reporting is his own. The poems bear witness to this, and their testimony is both confirmed and supplemented by the kindred but distinct expression from which they should not be divorced. Mr. William Rossetti, author of the descriptive catalogue of Blake's art works, uses language helpful in the effort to comprehend the expression of this most daring and startling soul of his time, —

"'ELOHIM CREATING ADAM.'

"The Creator is an amazingly grand figure, worthy of a primeval imagination or intuition. He is struggling, as it were, above Adam, who lies distended on the ground, a serpent twined around one leg. The colour has a terrible power in it; and the entire design is truly a mighty one.

"'FIRE.'

"Blake, the supreme painter of fire, in this his typical picture of fire, is at his greatest; perhaps it is not in the power of art to transcend this treatment

of the subject in its essential features. The water-colour is unusually complete in execution. The conflagration, horrid in glare, horrid in gloom, fills the background; its javelin-like cones surge up amid conical forms of buildings ('Langham Church steeples,' they may be called, as in No. 151). In front, an old man receives from two youths a box and a bundle which they have recovered; two mothers and several children crouch and shudder, overwhelmed; other figures behind are running about, bewildered what to do next."

The design "When the Morning Stars Sang Together," is, in the language of Dante Rossetti, one that "never has been surpassed in the whole range of Christian art."

We have noted some of Blake's defects. His weaknesses, his failures, conceded, his fame, without the aid of his wondrous work in the sister art, stands firm on a few poems, — poems now exquisite, now virile, always imaginative, musical, and masterly. If ever poet was born, it was the author of these lines, written when he had barely entered the teens, —

"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

"He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

"With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

"He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty."

The inspiration is so like that of music itself that no name can be given the first eight poems; they are entitled simply "Song." None but a son born of the muses could thus address them, —

"Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the Sun, that now
From ancient melody have ceased;

"Whether in heaven ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the earth,
Or the blue regions of the air
Where the melodious winds have birth;

"Whether on crystal rocks ye rove,
Beneath the bosom of the sea,
Wandering in many a coral grove;
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry;

"How have you left the ancient love
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move,
The sound is forced, the notes are few!"

Such are the verses of a boy, an untrained son of a London hosier, fallen on the evil days of

Pope. Let us not spend too much time prying into the environment. Nature reaches out her hand in the dry time and in the barren land, and some eternal bloom is sure to respond; she calls amid the din and jar of an indifferent world, and at its hoarsest hour a voice answers in tones so pure, so sweet, that they never leave the hearts of men, but tremble on, echoes out of heaven, from generation to generation.

"LOVE'S SECRET.

"NEVER seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind doth move
Silently, invisibly.

"I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart,
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears.
Ah! She did depart!

"Soon after she was gone from me,
A traveller came by
Silently, invisibly:
He took her with a sigh."

Or, to go back to the period of boyhood, —

"SONG.

. . . . .

"JOYS upon our branches sit,
Chirping loud and singing sweet;
Like gentle streams beneath our feet,
Innocence and virtue meet.

Thou the golden fruit dost bear,
I am clad in flowers fair;
Thy sweet boughs perfume the air,
And the turtle buildeth there.

There she sits and feeds her young,
Sweet I hear her mournful song;
And thy lovely leaves among
There is Love: I hear his tongue.

. . . . .

Among the lyrics, rippling the melodies that neither time nor toil can teach, that neither wisdom nor ambition can attain, — here is the haunt of the real Blake. Here is the poet; where one line is worth all his riddles of politics, of metaphysics, and what not, which serve no purpose but to show into what unavailing vapor, into what damp and devouring shadow, the bright child of song may wander. A thousand "Jerusalems" and "Urizens" cannot smother the pure star-flame; it springs triumphant despite such extinguishers as the "Book of Ahania" and the "Song of Los."

"Father, O Father! What do we here,
In this land of unbelief and fear?
The land of dreams is better far,
Above the light of the morning star."

While this mood holds, we learn anew the difference between the stocks and stones of prose and the rejoicing stars of song.

Atmosphere is confessedly one of the sure

tests of the poet, and the secret of Blake's power in this element remained inviolate until the time of Coleridge. Be it sleeping child or prowling beast, the magic accents fall, and we are enveloped by heavenly innocence or by horrors of the wild.

A CRADLE SONG.

SLEEP, sleep, beauty bright,
Dreaming in the joys of night;
Sleep, sleep; in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

As thy softest limbs I feel,
Smiles as of the morning steal
O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Where thy little heart doth rest.

Oh the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep!
When thy little heart doth wake,
Then the dreadful light shall break.

THE TIGER.

TIGER, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burned that fire within thine eyes?
On what wings dared he aspire?
What the hand dared seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
When thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand formed thy dread feet?

What the hammer, what the chain,
Knit thy strength and forged thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dared thy deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

If Cowper first counsels a loving return to Nature, Blake seconds him with insight not found again until we come to Wordsworth, and with passion not found again till we come to Burns. The photography of Thomson, the classic handling of Gray and Collins, the smooth, soothing rurality of Goldsmith, the close, hard-lined matter of Crabbe, — none of these exhibit the enthusiasm and affection that in Blake's work and in Cowper's stamp these two blessed madmen as the ancestors of Nature's laureate, the poet of Rydal; and not Wordsworth himself was more at home with the simplest beings and things, the children, the lambs, and the blossoms. Does

Blake sing of these, the notes of gentle old Ramsay are not more native and sweet; and none of all the singers named excel him in evanescent touches, in airy ignition, mystic flashes, beyond the reach of will and endeavor. And it must not be forgotten that this distinguishing charm of the Elizabethans was recalled amid the monotonous, choppy hum of the phrase-factory still running with the impetus of the Restoration.

In the light of modern research it is hardly safe to decide that Blake did not see things invisible to the physical eye. If he was a man when he said he had touched the sky with his stick, he was a child when he saw, on the tree, angels for apples. He had, from the first, what we term a sixth sense; and while at times he pushed this gift too hard, not always is he to be taken seriously. One can easily imagine a twinkle in his great eyes as he gravely asks a stiff, unimaginative companion, "By the way, did you ever see a fairy funeral?" But fact or fancy, let us be thankful for so pretty stories; few are they that can tell them: —

"I was walking alone in my garden; there was great stillness among the branches and flowers, and more than common sweetness in the air; I heard a low and pleasant sound, and I knew not whence it came. At last I saw the broad leaf of a flower move, and underneath I saw a procession of crea-

tures, of the size and colour of green and grey grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose leaf, which they buried with songs, and then disappeared. It was a fairy funeral."

"All things," Blake affirms, "exist in the human imagination." This he believed. "It must be right," he says; "I saw it so." Whether or not he hobnobbed with Moses and Homer is of little importance compared with the fact expressed in his own noble words, "I possess my visions and peace." Madness of the right sort has its charms for the stablest critic. "There is something in the madness of the man," says Wordsworth of Blake, "that interests one more than the sanity of Byron and Walter Scott." Ay, would the world were full of so brave, so joyous, so beautiful lunacy! Heaven send many such madmen; for it is largely through them that we learn to scorn the dust and darkness of the ground. Hark! it is the call of this free, soaring son of the morning:—

> "O Earth, O Earth, return!
> Arise from out the dewy grass!
> Night is worn,
> And the morn
> Rises from the slumbrous mass."

IX.

WILLIAM COWPER.

HE loss of a tender mother when he was but six years old, the hard experience of a boarding-school, and two years' treatment by an oculist — this the boy Cowper endured before getting to Westminster School. Nor did his fortunes rise on leaving this institution. At eighteen he went to live with a solicitor, and three years afterward took chambers; then came disappointment in love, and, at thirty-two, eighteen months in a madhouse. The subsequent life with the Unwins had a brighter side; but this, too, must have proved dreary to other than a lone, stricken, helpless soul escaped from madness. Poverty meanwhile pressed in; and, what was worse, the person of the Rev. Mr. John Newton, ex-rake and slave-trader. Next and naturally came a second fit of madness, which in its turn gave way to drawing, carpentering, and gardening, — to any employ that might take a frail, frightened hypochondriac out of his miserable self.

Such, in outline, was Cowper's preparation for the office of poet. Something good should come of so severe schooling; and something good did come, though hardly at the first attempt. "The Progress of Error," "Truth," "Expostulation," "Charity," "Hope," "Conversation," "Retirement" — these efforts were initiatory, as were the fifty years of suffering; they must be endured before the pent fire could burst through the tough strata of sorrow and theology. Besides, a new influence, a smack of the world and the flesh, must come, — Lady Austen must appear, before all things were in readiness for "The Task."

But we are getting to "The Task" too soon. Let us look closer into the singular constitution and the forlorn fortunes of this gentleman singer to the peasantry, of this gyved Newtonian whom Nature loved to free for a season, of this doomed madman whom the hovering muses held from destruction.

"I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and heal'd and bade me live.

> Since then, with few associates, in remote
> And silent woods I wander, far from those
> My former partners of the peopled scene;
> With few associates, and not wishing more."

We have here a religious recluse; and this on mature deliberation, with the resolve to so remain. But why a recluse; because nature so intended? There is no evidence to support an inborn tendency toward isolation; furthermore, there is no evidence to prove a constitutional determination for the apostleship of a narrow, ascetic theology. It is not always remembered that Cowper was as much a son of Poesy as he was of his dear lost mortal mother; or, if this be remembered, it is forgotten how delicate, how weak and brittle, are certain of the poetic fibres. It was Cowper's misfortune to inherit *en masse* the frailties of his high-born race, and to fall on a time and into a way of life so uncongenial as to be fatal to his peace and all but to his existence. It is hard enough for any child to lose a fond mother; for this child it was a blight of his very being. And in her stead stood immediately the boarding-school!

"I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he [a ruffian school-fellow] made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of

his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress."

And the Temple was little better suited to the needs of the sensitive, dependent being whose chief happiness, in a life of threescore years and ten, was to be led, like a child, by a loving woman's hand. The very thought of an office, the prospect of which would be transporting to the sons of poverty in general, meant to him despondency, torture. Cowper was thirty-one years old when trying to prepare for the "Clerkship of the Journals," but he is the same trembling child that could not see above the bully's shoe-buckles, —

"The feelings of a man when he arrives at the place of execution are, probably, much as mine were every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day for more than half a year together."

To overlook the constitutional delicacy, the brittleness of the poetic fibre, the predisposition to heart-break, and attribute the abnormal condition to religion, which came afterward and was accidental, is to fall into error. "I was a stricken deer" — this is the whole story. Hence we have the recluse; and as for the religious element, it may be said, first, that affliction, that

madness, finds its own way to relief; secondly, that time and circumstances set the present victim on the Newtonian course, and sustained him in it.

At fifty years, then, we find Cowper hurt beyond healing, all but lost in doleful theology; a refugee from the world of which he knew little, and that little horrible to recall; a child still, whose only hope was in the one power that can minister to children, — woman's affection. Good soul that "Mary" was, — Cowper's stay, his earthly salvation, — how the wound must have bled to reduce him to the submission that he portrays! —

"As to amusements, — I mean what the world calls such, — we have none. The place, indeed, swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists.

"Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner,

but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all, the family are called to prayers. I need not tell you that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly, we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren."

This is pathetic indeed; but dwell for a moment on that most misplaced man at whose nod Cowper's spirits rose and sank like the willow spray before a northeaster. The Rev. Mr. John Newton was, no doubt, of good battering-ram service against the coarse immorality, the rough-and-tumble profligacy of his time; but think of such an engine whanging against a statuette of spun glass, imagine such a master for Cowper! It is a wonder that the brittle victim did not break, shatter into a thousand pieces. Were the author

of "The World before the Flood" addressing an audience of that period, he might be pardoned one passage in his preface to the Olney Hymns:

"To Newton the world owes Cowper, as Cowper appears to the world. It is not presumed that had the latter never fallen in with the former, he might not have broken out from inglorious obscurity, in all the power of irrepressible genius, — but whatever other, or even higher, achievements he might have wrought, under different circumstances, those by which he will be forever known and honored and endeared, were all (directly or indirectly) called from his slumbering mind (oppressed by a burden more awful than Etna, and all its fires, on the breast of the giant Enceladus), by the awakening voice, the animating example, and the cordial companionship of Newton."

At this safe distance, it may not be rash to try a few strains of the "awakening voice," —

"Such was the wicked murderer Cain,
And such by nature still are we,
Until by grace we 're born again,
Malicious, blind, and proud as he.

. . . . .

"I would, but cannot sing,
Guilt has untuned my voice,
The serpent's sin-envenom'd sting
Has poison'd all my joys."

Such awakening, animating cordiality as this might serve well the hardened wretches of Olney

a hundred and twenty years ago; but it was specially directed toward the softest of wretches, — our poor ruined poet, too innocent already. Cheering companion indeed! Cowper could not write him a letter that was not black as a thunder-cloud; he must shrink from disclosing to him the awful fact that he had been penning certain harmless lines to a sofa, a dozen of which are worth many dozens of those inspired by the "animating example" and "cordial companionship."

The time is at last ripe for change, the pent poetry is about to burst through. The chief incentive to song may be disclosed in Cowper's own happy language: —

"Now therefore for the interruptions at which I hinted. There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney, but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and

more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls abovesaid, by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all, — a measure the rather expedient, because in winter the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighborhood, I made it my particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon became laws."

"Sensible" indeed was "Sister Anne," and, whatever the world before the flood may think, we moderns must style *her* the "animating" spirit; for to her we owe not only "The Task," but the lines "On the Loss of the Royal George," not to speak of "The Diverting History of John Gilpin."

Though he failed to assert himself for a round half-century, Cowper was a born poet. "When I can find no other occupation," he says, "I think; and when I think, I am very apt to think in rhyme." What lines may be cited as examples of Cowper's thought in numbers? It were safer to look for them the farthest possible from the Newtonian Methodism, in the tranquil pres-

ence of Nature and in those simple homely scenes dear to a warm, home-loving heart. From this source were drawn the choicer strains of "The Task." If the spread of "rural ease" is somewhat lavish, there is no danger that the rushing world will partake too freely; nor is it to be feared that the protuberant "piety and virtue" will do any more harm than to interfere now and then, as in the case of Wordsworth, with the requirements of art.

"Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit, while they fill the mind;
Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
Nor less composure waits upon the roar
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighboring fountain, or of rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course.
. . . . . .
Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
. . . . . .

> Thus oft reclined at ease, I lose an hour
> At evening, till at length the freezing blast
> That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home
> The recollected powers, and snapping short
> The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves
> Her brittle toys, restores me to myself.
> How calm is my recess! and how the frost
> Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear
> The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within!"

Direct, easeful, chaste — Cowper's best work is all this, and more; the superstructure is raised on the sound foundation of good judgment. Beyond the qualifications, excellent sense, spontaneity, and taste, Cowper's work reveals both pathos and humor. Could we go on, and add the supreme gift, imagination, we should have a poet of the first order. But it will not do to claim for Cowper great imaginative power; nor can we credit him with the certainty, the continuity, of inspiration that stamps a master of the guild. We look to him in vain for the sublime; furthermore, we find that if he can move lightly and gracefully on levels not the highest, he can also plod there, and that right heavily. The tread gets heavy, the hand gets heavy; the fingers are naturally nimble, but suddenly on go the Methodist mittens, and we are in for a pull of theologic fumbling. On his own statement Cowper had a poor memory, and one of the easiest things for him to forget was that polemics

is not poetry. He was prone, moreover, to ponderosity; he could attack a sore toe with as much gravity as if storming the towers of Ilium:

> "Oh, may I live exempted (while I live
> Guiltless of pampered appetite obscene)
> From pangs arthritic, that infest the toe
> Of libertine excess!"

Again, it must be remembered that, with all his sincerity, and regard for the poet's office, Cowper was writing against time. A poet may tug away indefinitely at lettuces and cauliflowers for his own private delectation; but, unless it be in a match against time, he will not compel the muse to toil with him for the space of ninety-eight lines on that "prickly and green-coated gourd" vulgarly known as the cucumber. Unquestionably, Cowper wrote against time; but let it not be understood that he held the office of poet in light esteem. On the contrary, he held it in high regard, and gave to his art patient, intelligent study. What he says of Thomson's verse and of his own, what he says of Pope's verse, especially of his translation of Homer, what he says of poetry in general, goes straight to the mark. If he could not hold up to his ideal, neither could Wordsworth, neither could other poets greater than Wordsworth. Whatever be his performance, there is no question as to his ideal. "Perspicuity," he says, "is more than

half the battle. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning." Pithy observations of this sort are common with him.

Cowper was deficient in imagination, in the staying power; he lacked passion, he confused rhyme with religion, and stuck the rough stalk of didacticism in the place of the light leaves and the beauteous, odorous blossoms of song; he was narrow and priest-ridden; his heart — a pardonable failing — could beat down his judgment; and lastly, poor soul! he was a victim of even a worse tyrant than the curate of Olney, — a "troublesome stomach"; and yet, all this admitted, largely on him rests the burden of English song for his century. He touched the graver social questions of his time, yes, the great problems of the race, with a new and quickening hand which pointed the more highly inspired of his followers the way to glory; and he is the leader on the loving return to Nature, to the wholesome gospel of the ground. Unstable, helpless, in certain particulars, when it comes to accuracy of sight, to purity of report, he is independent, stanch; here, indeed, he stands quite by himself. He read with more or less attention the gifted prose writers that ushered in his era; read his contemporaries illustrious in fiction; read the historians Robertson and Gibbon, and the half-dozen poets who sang with him and still

make themselves heard while their fellows have dropped into silence, — he read these men, but owed them little. Shakespeare, Milton, and Rousseau — we can hardly add a fourth to those exercising a direct influence on the writings of this poet. Cowper set down only his own; he took his matter first-hand, nor was he an imitator in point of style.

"My descriptions," he says, "are all from nature: not one of them second-hand. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience: not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string), I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed."

His blank verse, at its best, is free and lucid; he was no novice at the lyric; and his Pegasus now and then pricked his ears at a mild "crack of the satiric thong."

Among the shorter pieces, "On the Loss of the Royal George," "Boadicea," "The Shrubbery," not to go further, would add to the laurels of a poet of the first order: —

"Oh, happy shades — to me unblest!
Friendly to peace, but not to me!
How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

"This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quivering to the breeze,
Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if anything could please.

. . . . . .

"The saint or moralist should tread
This moss-grown alley, musing slow;
They seek, like me, the secret shade,
But not, like me, to nourish woe!

"Me fruitful scenes and prospects waste,
Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
And those of sorrows yet to come."

Here is perfect finish, without a suggestion of the sleekness of much of Goldsmith's work, without a trace of the labor that shows equally with the beauty in the verses of Gray.

And what poet could ask for more propitious moods than those that inspired such passages as the opening of "The Pineapple and the Bee," and such a poem as "The Needless Alarm"?

"The pineapples, in triple row,
Were basking hot, and all in blow;
A bee of most discerning taste
Perceived the fragrance as he pass'd;
On eager wing the spoiler came,
And searched for crannies in the frame,
Urged his attempt on every side,
To every pane his trunk applied;
But still in vain, the frame was tight,
And only pervious to the light:
Thus having wasted half the day,
He trimm'd his flight another way."

The appetite sharpened with the taste of this, one cannot help adding an extract from "The Needless Alarm," a kindred composition where no "Cynthio," or other ogling ugliness, brushes in to frighten off the muse, —

"Sheep grazed the field; some with soft bosom press'd
The herb as soft, while nibbling stray'd the rest;
Nor noise was heard but of the hasty brook,
Struggling, detain'd in many a petty nook.
All seem'd so peaceful, that, from them convey'd,
To me their peace by kind contagion spread.
"But when the huntsman, with distended cheek,
'Gan make his instrument of music speak,
And from within the wood that crash was heard,
Though not a hound from whom it burst appear'd,
The sheep recumbent and the sheep that grazed,
All huddling into phalanx, stood and gazed,
Admiring, terrified, the novel strain,
Then coursed the field around, and coursed it round again;
But recollecting, with a sudden thought,
That flight in circles urged advanced them nought,
They gather'd close around the old pit's brink,
And thought again — but knew not what to think."

These are choice specimens of art, worthy of the poet the first to revive the happy report of Nature that dropped into silence with the magic numbers of Milton. The life of Nature and the glow of the home hearth were so faithfully reflected from his soul that they shine to-day, and will shine on as long as men remember the few abiding elements of strength and happiness.

This child of sorrow was also the child of song, of jealous, unforgetful Poesy; his strains are mingled with the music of the years.

We are wont to speak of Cowper as a poet only, and we accept and love him with all his imperfections on his head; but the letters — who has surpassed them, who has equalled them? "We are now quiet as dormice in a hollow tree"; "Harrold, who is subtle as a dozen foxes"; "Many an ugly bundle can find a husband in such a place as Olney, while Venus herself would shine there unnoticed;" "An almost general cessation of egg-laying among the hens has made it impossible for Mrs. Unwin to enterprise a cake," — like felicitous expressions recur to us, parts of an artistic whole, the framework and details of which are at the very top of literary cunning. Southey is right: Cowper is the champion correspondent.

TO LADY HESKETH.

OLNEY, Feb. 9, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — . . . And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I antici-

pate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son, all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present; but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you,

and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. . . .

Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin.

W. C.

X.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

IN one of the best editions of the English Poets we are informed that "Wordsworth's poetry and his idea of the office of poetry must be traced to the Revolution." The tracings, — the domicile, the dates, and other kindred matters, take more than their share of the critic's attention nowadays, putting into the background the two important points, what does the poet say, and how does he say it? Like Cowper, Wordsworth was orphaned at a tender age; Dorothy is ministering angel in place of Mary, and Coleridge — heaven be praised therefor — is counsellor in the place of the Rev. Mr. Newton; it is now stamp-distributing instead of hutch-building, and again we have a long stretch of years with little reading and much Nature and solitude. It is very well to know this; but, with it and more of the sort, we are yet far from knowing the two poets. Better biographical matter will be found by questioning the poets themselves. Cowper answers, —

"I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades."

Wordsworth responds, in the opening lines of the introduction to "The Prelude," —

"O there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
A visitant that while it fans my cheek
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings
From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.
Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come
To none more grateful than to me; escaped
From the vast city, where I long had pined
A discontented sojourner: now free,
Free as a bird to settle where I will.
What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale
Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove
Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream
Shall with its murmur lull me into rest?
The earth is all before me. With a heart
Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,
I look about; and should the chosen guide
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way. I breathe again!
Trances of thought and mountings of the mind
Come fast upon me: it is shaken off,
That burthen of my own unnatural self,
The heavy weight of many a weary day
Not mine, and such as were not made for me.
Long months of peace (if such bold word accord
With any promises of human life),
Long months of ease and undisturbed delight
Are mine in prospect; whither shall I turn,
By road or pathway, or through trackless field,
Up hill or down, or shall some floating thing
Upon the river point me out my course?"

If these two very different recluses do not stand before us now, distinctly outlined, the commentators must toil on in vain.

> "With a heart
> Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,
> . . . . . .
> Trances of thought and mountings of the mind," —

these lines stamp the new man. Strength, joy, imagination; here is a trinity of power not found in Cowper. Our solitaries are to devote themselves largely to Nature; what are to be their methods? We are prepared for dissimilarity, and we shall find it. Take the familiar echoes of their voices at the fall of evening: —

> "Come, evening, once again, season of peace,
> Return, sweet evening, and continue long!
> Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
> With matron step slow moving, while the night
> Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employ'd
> In letting fall the curtain of repose
> On bird and beast, the other charged for man
> With sweet oblivion of the cares of day;
> Not sumptuously adorn'd, nor needing aid,
> Like homely-featured night, of clustering gems;
> A star or two just twinkling on thy brow
> Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine
> No less than hers, not worn indeed on high
> With ostentatious pageantry, but set
> With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,
> Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.
> Come, then, and thou shalt find thy votary calm,
> Or make me so."

Thus Cowper; and now to Wordsworth: —

> "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
> The holy time is quiet as a nun
> Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
> Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
> The gentleness of heaven is on the sea.
> Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder everlastingly."

The class of composition does not matter; blank verse or sonnet, it is all one to our immediate purpose. In the first quotation, a meek votary draws a lovely picture; in the second, an inspired reporter gives an unsurpassed presentation of evening before reaching the end of the third line, and at the sixth line introduces the informing Presence that lies at the heart of his might, employing in the introduction the commanding cadence that bespeaks the voice for all time. If, as Arnold says, Wordsworth is not an exponent of the grand style, he abounds in such passages as these, the peculiar power of which is not more than matched by Milton himself. Provided these utterances are characteristic respectively of the voices of Olney and Rydal, the sympathetic student must now have a clew to their open secrets. These test accents well in mind, one is ready for Arnold's essay, and his selections from Wordsworth; which, in turn, being mastered, there is hope of profit from the poet's

complete works chronologically arranged and presented by the steady hand of Mr. John Morley.

In one of Cowper's spirited passages, beginning "Nor rural sights alone," we see what the sights and sounds of Nature do for him; they "restore the tone," they "exhilarate the spirit." With Wordsworth the influence rises to a continuous benediction, to a perpetual revelation of the myriad phenomena of life, of Nature not only but of the soul, one with Nature in a union mystic and indissoluble: —

> "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
> Thou Soul, that art the Eternity of thought!
> And giv'st to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion! not in vain,
> By day or starlight, thus from my first dawn
> Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human soul;
> Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
> But with high objects, with enduring things,
> With life and nature; purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying by such discipline
> Both pain and fear, until we recognize
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart."

If we wish to learn how Wordsworth came to break with the conventionalities, in literature, politics, and religion; to hold steady on his course while his contemporaries, Byron, Shelley, Keats, reeled to and fro; to push delusion aside, and stake all on a few eternal

principles; how he came, in a word, to see and to meet the new requirements of modern life and modern art, — to return to Nature, to champion free thought and deed, to reassert the native strength and splendor of man, — if we wish to learn all this, we must not rest content with a date, we must go back of the convenient 1793. The American and the French Revolutions plus the rupture of all Europe — these, combined, are not to be credited with Wordsworth's poetry. In the very first verses, written at fourteen years of age, we discover the Wordsworth to come: —

> "The Power of Education seemed to rise;
> Not she whose rigid precepts trained the boy
> Dead to the sense of every finer joy,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But she who trains the generous British youth
> In the bright paths of fair majestic Truth.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> From thence to search the mystic cause of things
> And follow Nature to her secret springs;
> Nor less to guide the fluctuating youth,
> Firm in the sacred paths of moral truth,
> To regulate the mind's disordered frame,
> And quench the passions kindling into flame;
> The glimmering fires of Virtue to enlarge,
> And purge from Vice's dross my tender charge."

Here is Wordsworth, pretty green, and fresh from Pope withal, but the very Wordsworth, whom

revolutions may quicken and strengthen, — this and no more. Poesy, indifferent to the chance of empire, took this child to her heart, and held him there.

The boy Wordsworth was conscious of the honor conferred; he never forgot it, as his devotion and egotism abundantly testify. He was a "dedicated spirit," an account of whom was worth hugging fifty years, to be given by his own hand as a last bequest to the world. If this boy, grown to manhood, sojourned in learned Germany, it was to continue the work begun in the English hills, — to write poetry; and if chance brought him a distinguished visitor at home or abroad, he proceeded to entertain him by reciting some of his verses. The egotism of Wordsworth is, after all, loyalty to his lineage, faithfulness to the exalted duties of his priesthood. If he depreciated other poets, it was because, as he saw it, they were not of the anointed; they were prone to profane the sacred office. This attitude, while it indicates weakness, limitation, indicates also strength of the purest kind, — the strength of sincerity, total absorption, consecration.

Wordsworth's notion of the poet's office is the old notion, grievously besieged, but safe forever, — the old notion that the great poet's office is to teach us "how to live well." So does he

establish his kinship with the great sons of song from time immemorial, and rebuke once more the perverse ingenuity untiringly exercised to robe the poet solely as a priest of pleasure. "To console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and sincerely virtuous," — such was Wordsworth's notion of his office.

In Wordsworth we have sincerity, simplicity, health, strength, the accent of the masters, imagination, and inspiration; enough surely to place him "on a line just short of the greatest of all time." Why just short of the greatest? Because the flower-field is, at times, all stalks, and in the place of melody and harmony there is creaking of cart-wheels. Humor is absent; taste is often otherwhere, — taste which never quits the fair eternal field. The austerity of Art! The rarest gifts must bend to her; the highest resolves, the warrior wills must bow down to her. Wordsworth was not always an artist, and he falls just short of the greatest. "Surely he was not an artist in the strictest sense of the word," says Lowell, "neither was Isaiah; but he had a rarer gift, the capability of being greatly inspired." He was, like our Emerson, a seer, a rarer being than the artist,

but a being with whom the artist must be united if the song is to reach the height of the greatest of all time. Any one of some twenty or thirty of the short poems, however, proclaims Wordsworth a thorough artist in his happier moments; and thankful indeed may we be for such moments as made possible "The Solitary Reaper" or the choicer of the sonnets.

Regarding the ode, "Intimations of Immortality," Arnold remarks, "But to say that universally this instinct [of delight in Nature] is mighty in childhood, and tends to die away afterwards, is to say what is extremely doubtful." The objectors to the truth of this experience speak as if Wordsworth dealt with infancy only, whereas he passes on to youth; and surely the fading of the splendors of youth is no fancy.

Again, Mr. Morley finds the line,

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,"

"nonsense." Mr. Morley can hardly have weighed Wordsworth's own explanation of the line; and one prefers to think that he has overlooked a certain passage in Coleridge.

"But the Ode," says Coleridge, "was intended for such readers only as had been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their utmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep

interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which cannot be conveyed, save in symbols of time and space. For such readers the sense is sufficiently plain."

In the face of the "something declamatory" found by Arnold, the "inequality" very plain to Swinburne, the "nonsense" apparent to Mr. Morley, the fact remains that rarely among the noblest poems in our language is to be found a composition the general effect of which is so impressive. At once a dirge and a song of triumph, this ode pours forth the mystic power that "enricheth the blood of the world."

We are not inclined to give much heed to Southey, these days, but his prediction concerning Wordsworth is not of the wildest sort: "He will probably possess a mass of merits superior to all except only Shakespeare." A mass of merits is already his admitted possession. To carry to full fruition the germs that sprouted in Thomson and Crabbe and Cowper, that bloomed here and there in the music of Burns; to perfect the overthrow of the affectation, the stiltedness, the rule-bound, book-blind monotony of the last century; to enlarge the breathing space of the soul, to make morality and religion more attractive than the pleasures that are for a season; to chant away the barriers between us and the great

eternal facts and beauties, and lead us by summer paths into the realm of abiding joy; to build a "princely throne on humble truth"; to stock a very heaven with the "simple produce of the common day"; to give us glimpses that make us less forlorn not only, but make us "heirs of truth and pure delight," — to do all this is to establish the possession of a "mass of merits"; and if any English poet has accomplished this, it is William Wordsworth.

XI.

A FORGOTTEN VOLUME.

N American edition of Lowth's "Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews" was brought out by Calvin E. Stowe, Andover, 1829. A writer in the "North American Review" (v. 31, 1830), commenting on the fact that the edition was presented with an apology, uses these words: —

"It will hereafter, perhaps, be regarded as an anomaly in the history of the human intellect, that the poems of Homer should for ages have attracted the attention of the profoundest minds, and been made for a time almost the exclusive object of criticism in all its forms, and of associated inquiry in all its ten thousand wanderings, and yet that the Hebrew writings of the inspired volume, though equally before the eye and in the memory of men, should have been long passed by with such total absence of everything like an attentive study, as to have left the great body of the most learned critics completely ignorant of their true nature, and gravely mistaking their poetry for prose."

Concerning the confusion and loss consequent on the common blindness, the reviewer goes on to say, —

"The evils which have arisen from a wrong conception of the nature of so great a portion of the inspired writings have been multiplied. They have been the occasion of almost all the objections of infidels and the cavils of irreligious men. There cannot be a doubt that just in proportion as the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the poetical parts of them, are keenly and critically scrutinized, such objections and such cavils will utterly fade from the mind."

There is much truth in this; moreover, renewed warrant for preferring Matthew Arnold as counsel in the case of poetry. He, in particular, of late years, has had the discernment and the courage to declare that the "best of religion is its poetry"; and to him more, perhaps, than to another the people owe the little right-seeing that they begin to have of the Old Scriptures, the straight sight that takes these writings as they were meant and for what they are, — a profound "criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." The ancient Hebrews had the language, the land, and the life to push the imagination to its highest; of which fact we need no further proof than that, after the waste and change of centuries, still theirs are the writings that men

of to-day find fullest of beauty and majesty, and name reverently the Sacred Book, The Book.

The views of Bishop Lowth concerning Hebrew poetry support so strongly, point by point, the views of the present writer that the temptation is strong to follow him in this particular path; but, for the present, let us quote him concerning the first great principles of all poetry as they have come down to us on the long authentic voice of the ages. First, as to the point so long blown round and round by the twisting winds of metaphysics, whirling up new difficulty with each circuit, —

"Poetry is commonly understood to have two objects in view, namely, advantage and pleasure, or rather an union of both. I wish those who have furnished us with this definition had rather proposed utility as its ultimate object, and pleasure as the means by which that end may be effectually accomplished. The philosopher and the poet, indeed, seem principally to differ in the means by which they pursue the same end. Each sustains the character of a preceptor, which the one is thought best to support, if he teach with accuracy, with subtlety, and with perspicuity; the other, with splendor, harmony, and elegance. The one makes his appeal to reason only, independent of the passions; the other addresses the reason in such a manner as even to engage the passions on his side. The one proceeds to virtue and truth by the nearest and most compen-

dious ways; the other leads to the same point through certain deflections and deviations, by a winding but pleasanter path. It is the part of the former so to describe and explain these objects that we must necessarily become acquainted with them; it is the part of the latter so to dress and adorn them that of our own accord we must love and embrace them.

"I therefore lay it down as a fundamental maxim that poetry is useful, chiefly because it is agreeable; and should I, as we are apt to do, attribute too much to my favorite occupation, I trust Philosophy will forgive me when I add that the writings of the poet are more useful than those of the philosopher, inasmuch as they are more agreeable" (p. 4).

A few lines farther on, is asked a question that should be no more readily put than answered; and yet there is no end of hesitation and stammering when it comes, for example, to certain lines of Browning's, —

"For what is a poet, destitute of harmony, of grace, and of all that conduces to allurement and delight? . . . The reason, therefore, why Poetry is so studious to embellish her precepts with a certain inviting sweetness, and, as it were,

'. . . tincture them with the honey of the Muses,'

is plainly by such seasoning to conciliate favor to her doctrine, as is the practice of even physicians, who temper with pleasant flavors their least agreeable medicines:

'Thus, the sick infant's taste disguis'd to meet,
They tinge the vessel's brim with juices sweet:
The bitter draught his willing lip receives;
He drinks deceiv'd, and so deceiv'd he lives';

as Lucretius expresses himself in illustration of his own design, as well as that of poetry in general" (pp. 5, 6).

And now, for a moment, think of the multitudinous definitions and decipherings, divisions and subdivisions, — all the painful processes of inquiry, saddled on some one kind or style of poetry, we will say the heroic; what is the gain if this much be not settled first?

"But if it be manifest, even in authors who directly profess improvement and advantage, that those will most efficaciously instruct who afford most entertainment, the same will be still more apparent in those who, dissembling the intention of instruction, exhibit only the blandishments of pleasure; and while they treat of the most important things, of all the principles of moral action, all the offices of life, yet laying aside the severity of the preceptor, adduce at once all the decorations of elegance and all the attractions of amusement; who display, as in a picture, the actions, the manners, the pursuits and passions of men; and by the force of imitation and fancy, by the harmony of numbers, by the taste and variety of imagery, captivate the affections of the reader, and imperceptibly, or perhaps reluctantly, impel him to the pursuit of virtue. Such is the real purpose of heroic poetry; such is the noble effect

produced by the perusal of Homer. . . . From philosophy a few cold precepts may be deduced; in history, some dull and spiritless examples of manners may be found: here we have the energetic voice of Virtue herself, here we behold her animated form. Poetry addresses her precepts not to the reason alone; she calls the passions to her aid; she not only exhibits examples, but infixes them in the mind. She softens the wax with her peculiar ardour, and renders it more plastic to the artist's hand. Thus does Horace most truly and most justly apply this commendation to the poets:

> 'What 's fair, and false, and right, these bards describe,
> Better and plainer than the Stoic tribe'" (pp. 6, 7).

If we are to form a just notion of what poetry is through the instrumentality of critics, this is the order of them to which our inquiries should be first addressed. "Poetry is the supreme of power": Keats's words are gospel to this old bishop and the good old minds behind him. The inevitable conclusion stares them in the face. There is not a single "if" to trip over, not so much as a "but" to stumble over. So with the student of to-day; he will find the way clear provided he turn to solid counsellors. Like the solicitous bishop of days by-gone, we must be content only with the best intelligence: —

"Since the sensible world," says Bacon, "is in dignity inferior to the rational soul, poetry seems to endow human nature with that which lies beyond

the power of history, and to gratify the mind with at least the shadow of things where the substance cannot be had. For, if the matter be properly considered, an argument may be drawn from poetry, that a superior dignity in things, a more perfect order, and a more beautiful variety delights the soul of man, than is found in nature since the fall. As, therefore, the actions and events which are the subject of true history are not of sufficient amplitude to content the mind of man; poetry is at hand, and invents actions of a more heroic nature. Because true history reports the success of events not proportionably to desert, or according to the virtue or vice that has been displayed in them; poetry corrects this, and represents events and fortunes according to justice and merit. Because true history, from the obvious similarity of actions, and the satiety which this circumstance must occasion, frequently creates a distaste in the mind; poetry cheers and refreshes it, exhibiting things uncommon, varied, and full of vicissitude. As poetry, therefore, contributes not only to pleasure, but to magnanimity and good morals, it is deservedly supposed to participate in some measure of Divine inspiration; since it raises the mind and fills it with sublime ideas, by proportioning the appearances of things to the desires of the mind, and not submitting the mind to things, like reason and history" (p. 9).

Had Donnelly, instead of playing the zany over Shakespeare and Bacon, instead of tinkering at a greater man than the Almighty himself was willing to set his hand to, spent his time crying

this passage up and down the streets, he would have displayed originality meriting something better than bread and water and shackles. The most of us have read this passage at one time or another, but we have not taken it and other great sayings that belong with it to our business and bosoms.

As in heroic poetry, so in tragedy, there is no escaping the conclusion that poetry is superior to philosophy as well as to history: —

"But if from the Heroic we turn to the Tragic Muse, to which Aristotle indeed assigns the preference, because of the true and perfect imitation, we shall yet more clearly evince the superiority of poetry over philosophy, on the principle of its being more agreeable. Tragedy is, in truth, no other than philosophy introduced upon the stage, retaining all its natural properties, remitting nothing of its native gravity, but assisted and embellished by other favouring circumstances. What point, for instance, of moral discipline have the tragic writers of Greece left untouched or unadorned? What duty of life, what principle of political economy, what motive or precept for the government of the passions, what commendation of virtue is there which they have not treated of with fulness, variety, and learning? . . .

"Should it be objected that some have been eminent in this walk of poetry who never studied in the schools of the philosophers nor enjoyed the advantages of an education above the common herd of mankind, I answer that I am not contending about

the vulgar opinion, or concerning the meaning of a word. The man who, by the force of genius and observation, has arrived at a perfect knowledge of mankind; who has acquainted himself with the natural powers of the human mind, and the causes by which the passions are excited and repressed; who not only in words can explain, but can delineate to the senses, every emotion of the soul; who can excite, can temper and regulate the passions — such a man, though he may not have acquired erudition by the common methods, I esteem a true philosopher. The passion of jealousy, its causes, circumstances, its progress and effects, I hold to be more accurately, more copiously, more satisfactorily described in one of the dramas of Shakespeare than in all the disputations of the schools of philosophy.

"Now, if Tragedy be of so truly a philosophical nature; and if to all the force and gravity of wisdom it add graces and allurements peculiarly its own, — the harmony of verse, the contrivance of the fable, the excellence of imitation, the truth of action; shall we not say that philosophy must yield to poetry in point of utility? or shall we not rather say that the former is greatly indebted to the latter, of whose assistance and recommendation it makes so advantageous a use, in order to attain its particular purpose, utility, or improvement?" (pp. 7, 8.)

The wise old bishop will press on beyond most travellers of to-day when it comes to distinguishing between the inspiration of Shakespeare and that of the author of "Job"; but so far as we can accompany him his words are certainly worth

whole shelves of modern books on the subject of poetry.

"But, after all, we shall think more humbly of poetry than it deserves, unless we direct our attention to that quarter where its importance is most eminently conspicuous; unless we contemplate it as employed on sacred subjects and in subservience to religion. This indeed appears to have been the original office and destination of poetry; and this it still so happily performs that in all other cases it seems out of character, as if intended for this purpose alone. In other instances poetry appears to want the assistance of art, but in this to shine forth with all its natural splendour, or rather to be animated by that inspiration which, on other occasions, is spoken of without being felt. These observations are remarkably exemplified in the Hebrew poetry, than which the human mind can conceive nothing more elevated, more beautiful, or more elegant; in which the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully equalled by the energy of the language and the dignity of the style. And it is worthy observation that as some of these writings exceed in antiquity the fabulous ages of Greece, in sublimity they are superior to the most finished productions of that polished people. Thus, if the actual origin of poetry be inquired after, it must of necessity be referred to religion; and since it appears to be an art derived from nature alone, peculiar to no age or nation, and only at an advanced period of society conformed to rule and method, it must be wholly attributed to the more violent affections of the heart, the nature of which is to express themselves in an animated and

lofty tone, with a vehemence of expression far remote from vulgar use" (p. 18).

Whatever our religious belief, we can agree with this; and in the agreement we shall go a long way toward settling contention and confusion, toward preventing waste of time over commentators as injurious as ingenious, as delusive as voluminous.

This critic of great poetry will not be found scorning the small poetry. So thoroughly is he at home in the art that he can unbend with all the grace and fervor of Jean Paul to dwell fondly on the precious lyrics of slender theme, the little wafts of fancy, the fitful breaths of bird-like melody, which charm in moments of mirth or idleness, —

"Not entirely to omit the lighter kinds of poetry, many will think that we allow them full enough when we suppose their utility to consist in the entertainment which they afford. Nor is this altogether to be despised if it be considered that this entertainment, this levity itself, affords relaxation to the mind when wearied with laborious investigation of truth; that it unbends the understanding after intense application; restores it when debilitated; and refreshes it, even by an interchange and variety of study. In this we are countenanced by the example and authority of the greatest men of Greece, by that of Solon, Plato, and Aristotle; among the Romans, by that of Scipio and Lælius, Julius and Augustus

Cæsar, Varro and Brutus, who filled up the intervals of their more important engagements, their severer studies, with the agreeableness and hilarity of this poetical talent. Nature indeed seems in this most wisely to have consulted for us, who, while she impels us to the knowledge of truth, which is frequently remote, and only to be prosecuted with indefatigable industry, has provided also these pleasing recreations as a refuge to the mind, in which it might occasionally shelter itself, and find an agreeable relief from languor and anxiety" (p. 15).

The critic that so finds can go further; can find that the practice as well as the reading of poetry is essential as a means of culture, —

"But there is yet a further advantage to be derived from these studies, which ought not to be neglected; for, beside possessing in reserve a certain solace of your labours, from the same repository you will also be supplied with many of the brightest ornaments of literature. The first object is, indeed, to perceive and comprehend clearly the reasons, principles, and relations of things; the next is, to be able to explain your conceptions, not only with perspicuity, but with a degree of elegance. For in this respect we are all of us in some measure fastidious. We are seldom contented with a jejune and naked exposition even of the most serious subjects; some of the seasonings of art, some ornaments of style, some splendour of diction, are of necessity to be adopted; even some regard is due to the harmony of numbers and to the gratification of the ear. In all these respects, though I grant that the language of poetry

differs very widely from that of all other kinds of composition, yet he who has bestowed some time and attention on the perusal and imitation of the poets will, I am persuaded, find his understanding exercised and improved as it were in this Palæstra, the vigour and activity of his imagination increased, and even his manner of expression to have insensibly acquired a tinge from this elegant intercourse. Thus we observe in persons who have been taught to dance, a certain indescribable grace and manner; though they do not form their common gesture and gait by any certain rules, yet there results from that exercise a degree of elegance which accompanies those who have been proficients in it even when they have relinquished the practice. Nor is it the least improbable that both Cæsar and Tully (the one the most elegant, the other the most eloquent of the Romans) might have derived considerable assistance from the cultivation of this branch of polite literature, since it is well known that both of them were addicted to the reading of poetry, and even exercised in the composition of it. This too is so apparent in the writings of Plato that he is thought not only to have erred in his judgment, but to have acted an ungrateful part, when he excluded from his imaginary commonwealth that art to which he was so much indebted for the splendour and elegance of his genius, from whose fountains he had derived that soft, copious, and harmonious style for which he is so justly admired" (pp. 15–17).

Blessed old bishop! Poetry is serviceable even as a sort of Delsarte practice for the mind and heart.

Verily the Oxford boys one hundred and fifty years ago had a decided advantage over their successors of to-day. Were the present time as favorable to poetry as theirs, we should hear not a word, for instance, of the warfare between Poetry and Science, — Science which the enlightened Tyndall terms Poetry's "younger sister"; not a syllable would be lisped on such a topic as "Is Verse in Danger?" The good bishop would as soon have thought of doubting the existence of the soul and the High Power on which it leans as of questioning the imperishability of song, — song, which has taught us the most we know of these.

With this peep into a forgotten volume, it remains but to commend it to young and old, to all ranks and classes from shoeblack to scholar; to commend it for a better understanding of the Scriptures and for advancement in knowledge concerning the ruling force, the "supreme of power," poetry.

POSTSCRIPT.

Bishop Lowth began lecturing in 1741, one hundred and fifty-eight years after Sidney wrote his "Defence of Poesy." A few quotations from Sidney will show, without argument, that the old notion of poetry was transmitted intact, and so held till the middle of the eighteenth century.

"This heart-ravishing knowledge" is one of his expressions; another is, "That unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind." The purpose of poetry is "to teach and delight"; poetry is the "sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge." The poet "doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it."

Eighty years later, in Shelley's "Defense of Poetry," we find the old notion getting dim. If Shelley be right when he says, "The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error," Sidney's exposition is without meaning; there is no substance in his firm phrase, "that same exquisite observance of number and measure in words, and that high-flying liberty of conceit proper to the poet." Taken in the half-sense, there is truth in Shelley's blunt statement, and in Sidney's "there have been many most excellent poets that never versified"; but taken in the whole sense, both observations are misleading. We cannot have poetry proper without the poet's vision *and* method *and* music, —

> ". . . The numbers which could call
> The stones into the Theban wall."

Shelley would have it that the aim of the poet is, not to "teach and delight," but to delight. He says, —

"Those in whom the poetical faculty, though great, is less intense, as Euripides, Lucan, Tasso, Spenser, have frequently affected a moral aim, and the effect of their poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose."

Teaching and compelling us to advert to the teaching are very different things. The poet teaches and delights, — delights because he does *not* compel us to advert to his purpose, but effects it while, in our delight, we are unconscious of what he is really doing.

Again Shelley says, —

"And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius."

On Milton's intent it is safe to take the testimony of Milton himself, —

> ". . . What in me is dark
> Illumine; what is low raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men."

If Shelley meant that the poet should not use the prose teacher's method, he is right; if he meant more than this, — and probably he did, — he is wrong. The great poets, as we have learned from Bishop Lowth, "dissembling the intention of instruction," exhibiting "only the

blandishments of pleasure," still "treat of the most important things, of all the offices of life." However, Shelley's testimony, taken as a whole, is a sufficient answer to any errant portion of it, —

"But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton, had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief. . . . Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Coming down seventy years, from 1821 to 1891, it may be profitable to inquire briefly into the success of Mr. Theodore Watts's attack on the old notion of poetry as formulated by Arnold. In his article on Lowell (*The Athenæum*, August 22, 1891) Mr. Watts says, —

"It is always difficult to know when Matthew Arnold is in earnest and when he is playing with his readers; but if he was in earnest when he defined poetry to be a 'criticism of life,' he certainly achieved in one famous phrase a definition of poetry which for whimsical perversity can never be surpassed. Had

he said the opposite of this, — had he said that all pure literature except poetry may be a criticism of life, but that poetry must be a simple projection of life in order for it to be separated from prose, — he might perhaps have got nearer to the truth."

If Mr. Watts, with all his acuteness, is not keen enough to discover when Arnold is in earnest and when he is at play, we must not blame him for being blind to very plain things; among them, the flippancy and padding, the newspaper recklessness, sometimes displayed in the columns of the *Athenæum*. In this article we are informed at the first dash that most Americans lack "moral, high-bred courage." This may be; but some of us have enough patience and courtesy to hear a speaker through before beginning to dispute him. Arnold did not define poetry as a "criticism of life," but as a "criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty"; as a "powerful application of ideas to life" under the conditions fixed by these laws. In exemplifying this application, he says that it has the accent of such a line as, —

"Absent thee from felicity awhile";

an injunction to which Mr. Watts seems to have yielded temporary obedience. Mr. Watts goes on to say, —

"If there is in any literary work a true projection of life, it must sometimes be classed as poetry, even though the writer shows but an imperfect conception of poetic art. Although much of Browning's noble and brilliant writing is a 'criticism of life,' and is, therefore, as I think, not poetry, a very considerable portion of his work is poetry, because it is a true projection, and not a criticism, of life. But Lowell's verse is all 'criticism of life.' Of poetic projection there is almost nothing at all."

While Mr. Watts is right in saying that much of Browning's writing is not poetry (he goes altogether too far in finding "almost nothing" of poetry in Lowell), how is it that, with his mind and experience, and Anglo-moral courage to top it all, he does not see that, instead of combating Arnold's idea, he is reproducing it in less happy words of his own? In saying that, because much of Browning's work is rather a criticism than a "projection" of life, it is something different from poetry, he is simply saying what Arnold says better; namely, that it is something different from poetry because it has not the "matter and the inseparable manner" of "adequate poetic criticism."

THE END.

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